ETHEL CHURCHILL:

OR,

THE TWO BRIDES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE IMPROVVISATRICE," "FRANCESCA CARRARA,"
"TRAITS AND TRIALS OF EARLY LIFE,"

ETC. ETC.

"Yet knowing something—dimly though it be;
And, therefore, still more awful—of that strange
And most tumultuous thing, the heart of man.
It chanceth oft that, mix'd with nature's smiles,
My soul beholds a solemn quietness
That almost looks like grief, as if on earth
There were no perfect joy, and happiness—
Still trembled on the brink of misery."—*Wilson.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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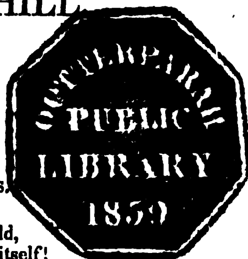
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ETHEL CHURCHILL


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CHAPTER I.

PRUDENCE IN POLITICS.

> How often, in this cold and bitter world,
> Is the warm heart thrown back upon itself!
> Cold, careless are we of another's grief;
> We wrap ourselves in sullen selfishness:
> Harsh-judging, narrow-minded, stern and chill
> In measuring every action but our own.
> How small are some men's motives, and how mean!
> There are who never knew one generous thought;
> Whose heart-pulse never quickened with the joy
> Of kind endeavour, or sweet sympathy—
> There are too many such!

It is rather alarming, in a conjugal *tête-à-tête*, when your husband tells you he only comes to complain of your conduct, and Lord Marchmont's severity of aspect was quite awful; however, Henrietta only gave him a look of inquiry, and he went on:—

"It was full three days ago that I told you how I hated the sight of black, yet you wore it yesterday evening, and I observe that your ribands are black this morning."

Tears started in the countess's eyes, but she repressed them; and, forcing a smile, said,

"I am glad to find that it is not my conduct, but my dress, that meets your disapprobation."

"I thought," replied her husband, "and the event proves that I was right in so thinking, that you would only laugh at what I should urge; but women are incapable of a serious thought!"

"Well!" returned Lady Marchmont, "at all events, you must allow me to be flattered at the interest you take in my personal appearance!"

"You are quite mistaken!" exclaimed Lord Marchmont; "I know too well what I owe to my own dignity as a man, to interfere in such feminine trifles, unless peculiar circumstances gave a temporary importance, which certainly does not belong to their ephemeral nature: I object to your wearing black on political grounds."

Henrietta looked at him with undisguised astonishment.

"Pray, madam," asked he, "for whom are you in mourning?"

The tears with which Henrietta had long been struggling, could be checked no longer, and her voice faltered, as she answered, "For Mrs. Courtenaye: you know she was my kind, my dear friend!"

"I know," returned her husband, "that she was Lord Norbourne's daughter. Are you aware that I have, for a week past, been in the opposition? But I own it is too much to expect that women should understand these matters."

"But what," asked Lady Marchmont, "has that to do with my wearing black?"

"I thought," replied his lordship, "that my reasons would be beyond your comprehension; I will, however, endeavour to adapt them to your understanding. Your wearing mourning for Lord Norbourne's daughter, is an external evidence of alliance between us; now, I am completely opposed to him. I hold his principles, which are those of the Walpole party, to be injurious to the rights which, as a free-born Briton, I am bound to maintain. I beg that you will wear coloured ribands to-night!"

"I am not going out," replied Henrietta.

"I insist upon it that you do. The Prince has sent us an invitation, and it was his royal highness who first drew my attention to your incongruous costume, by asking, 'for whom was Lady Marchmont in mourning?'"

"Your will, my lord, shall be obeyed!" replied Henrietta, almost involuntarily mimicking his solemn tone; "but do you know that Prince Frederick makes very strong love to me? Are you jealous?"

"I could not pay myself so bad a compliment," returned her husband, looking towards the mirror: "it is only acknowledging my taste, to admire my wife: but Lady Marchmont can never forget to whom she belongs!"

"It would be very difficult," thought Henrietta; but she kept her thoughts to herself, while his lordship, satisfied with

this display of eloquent authority, was employed in perfuming his handkerchief afresh. "I promise you," said she, after a pause of some minutes, "to wear the last new dress you gave me, it is a triumph of taste!"

Lord Marchmont bowed, and appropriated the compliment as if the taste had been his own, not the milliner's.

"And now," continued his wife, "I have a petition to offer."

"'When Beauty pleads, how can she plead in vain?'"

was his lordship's gallant reply.

"You know Miss Churchill? you used to admire her complexion so much. Well, her very foolish grandmother has mixed herself up in some nonsensical correspondence with the court of St. Germains; or, rather, has left herself be made a tool by Mr. Trevanion, who, I am happy to say, is not Ethel's husband; they arrested him just in time. However, the poor old lady is in great distress; she and her grand-daughter are coming up to London, and I wish to give them all possible countenance and assistance. May I ask them to stay here? I am so glad that you are in the opposition!"

"I always," replied Lord Marchmont, after a long pause, during which he vouchsafed not the slightest attention to the earnest and imploring looks of his wife, "have considered women to be superlatively foolish; but so glaring an instance of their folly never before came under my own personal knowledge! Because I am opposed to Sir Robert on some questions, is it immediately to be supposed that I am about to give up my country, my king, and my God!"

"Why, who ever asked you to do any thing of the sort?" ejaculated Henrietta, in utter dismay.

"You did, madam, when you ventured to suppose that I would make my house the rendezvous of conspirators and Jacobins!"

"I did but ask your protection," returned Lady Marchmont, "for a weak old woman, and a friendless young one!"

"Both very dangerous!" replied his lordship: "you may wish to see my head fall on a scaffold! I cannot join in your desire, and I must point your attention to the extreme ingratitude of your proceeding: I believe that you might go through London, and find your house and equipage unequalled; why you should, therefore, wish to engage me in plots and dangers, completely baffles even my penetration!"

"These things never entered my head!" exclaimed Lady Marchmont.

"You see how limited is your foresight: it is fortunate that you are connected with one who looks a little more into the consequences of actions than yourself!" replied he, with a self-complacent smile.

"Well, well," returned she, "I withdraw my request: I was wrong in making it. Wrong," thought she to herself, "in hoping that you could have one kind and generous feeling!"

"I rarely fail to convince!" said Lord Marchmont, rising: "I believe that we have no further occasion to trespass on each other's time. The morning is the most valuable portion of the day, properly applied. I wish, however, to give you one piece of advice before I leave: have I your permission?"

Henrietta bowed a polite assent.

"Allow me," continued Lord Marchmont, "to enter my protest against your passion for forming female friendships. They are generally useless—often inconvenient. Your friendship with Mrs. Courtenaye induced you to wear mourning, to the great hazard of my political consistency."

"He has only been in the opposition a week!" thought his wife.

"Your friendship for Miss Churchill has induced you to wish that I should lend the sanction of my countenance to traitors and Jacobins. I beg that, for the future, you will follow my example—I have no intimate friends!"

"I should very much wonder if you had!" muttered the countess, as the door closed on the slow and stately exit of her husband.

CHAPTER II.

AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT.

Love is a thing of frail and delicate growth;
Soon checked, soon fostered! feeble, and yet strong:
It will endure much, suffer long, and bear
What would weigh down an angel's wing to earth,
And yet mount heavenward; but not the less
It dieth of a word, a look, a thought;
And when it dies, it dies without a sign
To tell how fair it was in happier hours:
It leaves behind reproaches and regrets,
And bitterness within affection's well,
For which there is no healing.

Lady Marchmont rose from her seat, and unfastened the riband, less black than the hair that it bound.

"So, my poor Constance," said she, "I am not permitted even this memorial of her; and even Ethel I cannot serve. Of what avail," and her eyes wandered mechanically round, "is all the luxury by which I am surrounded, if it serve only as a barrier to all kindly feelings?"

Never had Lady Marchmont felt so lonely. Disdain for her husband was mingled with the bitterness of restraint; restraint, too, where her own heart told her she was right. There never was a finer nor a higher nature than Henrietta's: she was completely carried away by impulse; but then her impulses were all generous and lofty. She was enthusiastic, and keenly susceptible; a word, a look, would send the blush to her cheek, and the light to her eye: she was eager in whatever she undertook, and yet soon and easily discouraged: she was proud, and hence impatient of authority; but kindness could have done any thing with her. She needed to love, and to be beloved; her heart was full of warmth and emotion, to which some object was a sweet necessity. The destiny of one like Henrietta is made by the affections; these repressed or disgusted, checked the growth of all good, and the life that she was now leading was calculated to do any thing but foster any more lofty or kindly feeling.

Unbroken worldly prosperity has a natural tendency to harden the sympathies: when life comes so easily to ourselves, it is difficult to fancy it going hardly with others. Without any permanent object for exertion of any kind, we are

apt soon to sink into habits of indolent indulgence, and such are inevitably selfish. Vanity was Lady Marchmont's chief stimulous in the absence of a better one; and vanity is like a creeping plant, which begins by turning its lithe foliage round a single window, and ends by covering the whole edifice: but Henrietta was a difficult person to spoil, it would take many bitter lessons from experience before her passionate feelings could become cold and hardened. Her discontent at this moment was of no selfish order, but her tears fell heavily as she dwelt on the unkindness of not offering the aid that could have been so easily extended to her first and earliest friend. There is not a more bitter pang than that which accompanies the desire to befriend, and the inability of so doing.

At this moment the door of the closet opened, and Lady Mary Wortley Montague was announced. Their first intimacy had more than slackened, still a very decent appearance of civility was preserved. Henrietta had long since discovered that she had been much more grateful for Lady Mary's earlier attentions than was at all needed. This is one of the most unpleasant lessons that experience gives; and one, moreover, that it is perpetually giving; namely, that what we fancied was liking for ourselves, was, in reality, the result of calculation, or of amusement. We fancied we were liked, when we were only useful or entertaining. Moreover, there was that in Lady Mary Wortley's mind, which effectually prevented all sympathy between Henrietta and herself, and sympathy is the basis of all friendship. There was a coarseness in the one which revolted the almost fastidious delicacy of the other; and Lady Marchmont, full of poetry, touched with romance and sentiment, had nothing in common with the harsh and hard worldliness of Lady Mary; still, as they moved in the same circle, they met often, and were almost as polite as if they had never been friendly. Now, few friendships die a naturul death, they generally come to a violent end; and it showed no little tact in our rival beauties, that they allowed theirs to grow

"Fine by degrees, and beautifully less."

"I met Lord Marchmont on the staircase," said Lady Mary, "or else I should ask why you are looking so dull."

"I am so disappointed," replied Henrietta, who was young enough in grievances, to be eager to talk about them: "I wanted to ask some friends, who are coming up to London under

very disagreeable circumstances, to stay with us, and Lord Marchmont will not hear of it."

"For once," exclaimed her companion, "I take the husband's side; remember, that my so doing, is not to be considered a precedent: when they are in unpleasant circumstances, the less we see of our friends the better!"

"I beg to differ with you," returned Henrietta, colouring.

"You need not look so angry," returned Lady Mary; "at all events, not at me; I am not responsible for the established principles of society; I only stated what they are."

"The more I see of society," interrupted Lady Marchmont, "the more disgusted I am with it!"

"Fortunately for you, it does not return the compliment!" said Lady Mary: "but do send for Lord Marchmont again, if you want somebody to quarrel with: a husband is the only legitimate resource on such occasions!"

"What do you say to a lover?" asked Henrietta, laughing.

"Oh, you quarrel with your lover on his own account, he is not a resource! A lover's quarrel is made up of jealousies, doubts, hopes, fears, and all sorts of fantastic fancies: a matrimonial dispute, on the contrary, is composed of familiar and ordinary matter, a sort of ventilator to the temper!"

"But," said the young countess, "Lord Marchmont and I never quarrel."

"Oh!" returned her ladyship, with a sneer, "you are

'Content to dwell in decencies for ever!'

Well, for my part, I should prefer any thing to a perpetual calm."

Henrietta only thought how completely she agreed with her.

"It is very odd," continued her visiter, "that quarrels, which are so pleasant in love, should be so odious in marriage. I believe it is, that, in the first instance, they may have consequences; in the last, they have none: your lover may fear to lose you; your husband can only hope, and hope in vain: the lover dreads that every quarrel may be the last; the husband knows he may go on quarrelling to eternity!"

"A pleasant prospect!" exclaimed Lady Marchmont.

"Lawgivers were never more mistaken," said Lady Mary, "than when they ordained that the conjugal tie should last through life for better and worse; the last injunction being strictly complied with. There should be septennial marriages, as well as septennial parliaments!"

"Why, my dear Lady Mary," exclaimed Henrietta, laughing, "do you not represent one of your father's boroughs?"

"Why, indeed!" returned her companion. "I would bring in a bill every session; people grant more favours from being tired of refusing, than from any other motive. In life it is the irrevocable that is terrible: while there is change, there is hope. We should keep each other in much better order, if, at the end of seven years, there were to be a reckoning of grievances. It would be a good moral lesson to many a husband, to come down on the seventh anniversary and find his tea not made, and his muffin not buttered. These are the things that come home to a man's feelings!"

"And what," asked Henrietta, "if it were the gentleman who was reported missing?"

"Upon my honour," cried Lady Mary, "I cannot look on that in any other point of view than as a relief!"

Henrietta did not say how entirely she was of the same way of thinking.

"What is a woman's stronghold? Her coquetry! Now, coquetry cannot exist without uncertainty," continued the fair philosopher, "and a husband is so dreadfully secure! I am myself a coquette on principles, and some of them—not needful now to enumerate—very scientific ones. We have no influence but by our influence over those called our masters; how do we acquire that influence? By flattering a man's vanity, and by playing on his hopes and fears! These are all put *hors de combat* in marriage. We have already flattered to the utmost by our choice, and what is there for a husband to hope or to fear? Were my plan carried into execution, think of the delightful uncertainty of the seventh year!"

"As you cannot make a speech, you must," said Henrietta, "put it into a treatise."

"It is more than half finished," answered her ladyship, "and I have some thoughts of adding a few notes to my own sex, 'On the best methods of acquiring influence;' all might, however, be condensed into a single word—Love!"

"Which has," exclaimed Lady Marchmont, "the greatest power over ourselves!"

"And there lies our great mistake," replied Lady Mary: "it is the greatest folly to care for a lover, but as they give you influence, and contribute to your vanity: for a woman to love, is turning her arrows on herself!"

"All you say," answered Henrietta, "would be very true, if

life were a game of chess, to be played by certain given rules; but think how we are governed by our feelings, and carried away by our impulses. I cannot, nay, would not, lower as you do, the divinity of affection, for all the triumphs in the world! I would rather have been Egeria, beloved in the sweet silence of her shadowy grotto, than the goddess of Beauty, fresh risen from her native waters, with all the gods for her slaves!"

"Good morning, my dear!" exclaimed Lady Mary, rising; "I cannot endanger my morals by staying; I may grow romantic too: 'evil communication corrupts good manners.' Well, well, I see Sir George Kingston is the only lover for you, who pleads, as the excuse for his perpetual inconstancy, that no woman appreciates the poetry of his love!"

CHAPTER III.

MEETING OF OLD FRIENDS.

How much of change lies in a little space!
How soon the spirits leave their youth behind!
The early green forsakes the bough; the flowers,
Nature's more fairy-like and fragile ones,
Droop on the way-side, and the later leaves
Have artifice and culture—so the heart:
How soon its soft spring hours take darker hues!
And hopes, that were like rainbows, melt in shade;
While the fair future, ah! how fair it seemed!
Grows dark and actual.

It was a cold and rainy afternoon as Ethel Churchill sat at the window of their new abode, a house in one of the streets leading from the Strand to the river. It was the day after their arrival, and nothing could well be more gloomy than the view: the pavement was wet, and a yellow mist obscured every object, the passers glided by like phantoms, and the Thames, at the end, seemed dusk and heavy, as if a ray of sunshine had never rested on its waters. The room itself was large and dark, and had that peculiar air of discomfort which belongs to "ready furnished apartments:" every thing looks as if it had been bought at a sale, and there is an equal want of harmony both in the proportions and colours. The idea involuntarily occurs of how the chairs had encircled other hearths; of how, around the tables, had gathered family groups, broken

up by the pressure of distress and of want. All the associations are those of poverty; and of all human evils, poverty is the one whose suffering is the most easily understood: ever those who have never known it, can comprehend its wretchedness. Hunger, cold, and mortification, the disunion of families; the separation of those the most fondly attached; youth bowed by premature toil; age wasting the little strength yet remaining,—these are the familiar objects which surround poverty.

Ethel did not thus closely examine the causes of the weight upon her spirits; she only knew that the weight was there: she was strange, lonely, unsettled, and she looked forward to nothing. Never had she before felt so forcibly the change that a few months had worked in her; and she was sad when she remembered how young she was, and how little in life remained for her. How delighted she would have been but a very little while before, at the idea of a visit to London! now lassitude and discouragement were her predominant sensations. Ethel found the time hang heavily on her hands, the more heavily for expectation. A note from Lady Marchmont had reached her early in the morning, saying, that she would be with her young friend the very moment Lord Marchmont went out.

"The fact is, my dearest Ethel," so ran the note, "his lordship is terribly afraid of you. He sees the cause of the Stuarts triumph in your ringlets, and the downfall of the House of Hanover in your complexion. However, as I make a point of having my own way, I cannot let you be the first exception to the rule; therefore, expect me sometime in the afternoon: I shall, if you please, pass the evening with you, delightful under any circumstances, doubly delightful as an act of disobedience. Ever your affectionate

"HENRIETTA."

Ethel's heart clung to the writer, she was the only creature she knew in this vast city; and, moreover, if ever there was a being formed to win and fascinate, it was Lady Marchmont: a fault in her, was more charming than a merit in another. The very difference in character drew the friends together; different, also, in their styles of beauty, there had never been the shadow of rivalry between them: besides, both were quite young enough to have warmth, confidence, and mirth, those three ingredients of friendship.

The evening closed in, and Ethel began to make preparations

for her visiter. She ordered lights, had the curtains closed, and stirred the fire till the room looked quite cheerful in the blaze. Tea was then brought in; and Ethel had scarcely finished drawing two ponderous arm-chairs to each side of the fireplace, when the stopping of a chair in the hall announced Lady Marchmont. Ethel flew to the top of the stairs to meet her; and, in a few moments, each stood by the fire, in all the eagerness of welcome.

Tea was poured out, and each began to tell the other the many events that had taken place since their parting. Much, indeed, had occurred: they parted, girls; they met, women. A deeper meaning was in the face of either than when they sat with the moonlight falling over them beside the little fountain. They looked eagerly on each other, and felt that they were changed: there was as much, perhaps more beauty, but there was less brightness. The mind, more than the heart, gave its impression to the features. The blush came not at every second word; the cheek of either was paler; and Ethel's had an appearance of delicate health, very different from the morning bloom that it formerly wore.

There was an habitual sarcasm on Lady Marchmont's finely cut lip, and Ethel's smile had grown into a sad sweetness. On the brow was a deeper shadow—serious and thoughtful. The glad burst of laughter, the gay fantasies, the buoyant hopes, which they used to meet and share together, were all gone by for ever.

The servants removed the tea-things, and they drew nearer to the fire, and to each other. Both had a great deal to say, and yet the conversation languished; but we have all felt this after a long absence: confidence is a habit, and requires to be renewed. We have lost the custom of telling every thing; and we begin to fear that what we have to tell is scarcely worth being told. We have formed new acquaintances; we have entered into other amusements; we feel that our tastes are altered; and we require a little while to see if the change be mutual. Moreover, the affections are always timid; they require both encouragement and custom, before they can venture to communicate their regrets.

It is a curious, but an undeniable fact, that the meeting, after absence, of old friends, is almost always constrained and silent at first; they are surprised to find how little they have said of what they meant to say. It merely shows, after all, that affection is a habit.

CHAPTER IV.

REMINISCENCES.

Ah, tell me not that memory
  Sheds gladness o'er the past;
What is recalled by faded flowers,
  Save that they did not last?
Were it not better to forget,
Than but remember and regret?

Look back upon your hours of youth—
  What were your early years,
But scenes of childish cares and griefs?
  And say not childish tears
Were nothing; at that time they were
More than the young heart well could bear.

Go on to riper years, and look
  Upon your sunny spring;
And from the wrecks of former years,
  What will your memory bring?—
Affections wasted, pleasures fled,
And hopes now numbered with the dead!

"Shut yourself up—go nowhere!" exclaimed Lady Marchmont: "well, I cannot help your going mad; but, at all events, I will not aid and abet you in so doing. You are now in town, and a town life you must lead."

"I have," replied Ethel, leaning languidly back in her chair, "neither health nor spirits for gayety."

"A girl of nineteen talking of health and spirits!" interrupted her visiter; "why, you have beauty enough to supply the place of both. However, I have no objection to your adopting *le genre languissant*, it will the less interfere with my own. If you were to come out starry and startling, we should not be friends a week."

"Oh, Henrietta!" exclaimed Ethel, half reproachfully.

"Nay, don't look so serious; or, rather, upon second thoughts, do; for it is singularly becoming to you. It is delightful to think how we shall set each other off. I am dark, classical, and have some thoughts of binding my black tresses with myrtle, and letting Sir Godfrey Kneller finish my portrait as Aspasia: you, on the contrary, are soft, fair, with the

blue eyes and golden hair of a Madona. We shall always be contrasts, and never be rivals."

"At all events," answered Ethel, "we can never be the last."

"I don't know," said Lady Marchmont; "but, at all events, we will be generous about our lovers."

"I neither expect nor wish for any," said her companion.

"Not wish for a lover!" cried Henrietta; "I never heard any thing so absurd! or, perhaps, you would prefer waiting till after you are married?"

"My dear Henrietta," exclaimed Ethel colouring; and, after a moment's pause, added, "I never wish to hear the name even of a lover again."

"What, my dear, frightened at the narrow escape you had of being married?" replied Lady Marchmont, purposely alluding to the marriage; for she felt that even hinting at Norbourne Courtenaye was treading on too delicate ground. No woman likes to dwell on a subject so mortifying as a faithless lover.

"An escape you may well call it," replied her friend. "Oh, Henrietta! you do not know what a dreadful thing it is to see yourself on the point of being married to a man you both dislike and despise."

"But why did you consent to marry him?" asked Lady Marchmont a little conscience-stricken.

"Because I was utterly dispirited and ill: I had not strength to say 'No' to my grandmother, whom I had always been in the habit of obeying."

"They would not have found me so obedient," cried the countess.

"I was rather passive than obedient," replied Ethel; "but the interruption of the ceremony awakened me like a shock. The relief was what I cannot describe: I seemed to awake as if from a lethargy. Thought, resolution, and a belief in my own powers of resistance, appeared to revive suddenly within me. I have seen more, and reflected more, during the last month, than I ever did before in the whole course of my existence."

"Suppose Mr. Trevanion should obtain his pardon, would you still think yourself compelled to marry him?"

"No; though I should certainly not think myself justified in marrying another."

"Well, then," exclaimed Lady Marchmont, "I shall use my utmost influence to get him beheaded, out of the way, as soon

as possible. Dear, dear ! I am afraid that he would only be hanged ; at least, I can endeavour to have him complimented with the axe."

"My dear Henrietta, how can you jest on such serious subjects?"

"On what others would you have me jest?" replied her companion, her beautiful mouth curving with a bitter smile. "The serious things of life are its keenest mockeries. The things set apart for laughter are not half so absurd as those marked out for tears. Ah! if we did but look at life in its true point of view—false, hollow, mocking, and weary as it is!—we should just walk down this very street, and be found floating on the Thames to-morrow."

Ethel watched the sudden change that passed over her companion's face with silent surprise; which when Henrietta observed, she at once resumed her former gayety.

"It is not one of our least absurdities that we never do what we purpose doing. Here we met to-night, on purpose to talk over the past, and we have done nothing but talk over the future. Ah, I believe that most of us may as well forget the past!"

"Indeed we may," said Ethel; and a deeper shade of sadness passed across her sweet face.

"We have not only," added Lady Marchmont, "forgotten the past, but also the passing present. I hear my chair in the hall; and to keep Lord Marchmont waiting, when he has announced his intention of supping at home, far exceeds my prerogative; so good night, dearest, you will either see or hear from me to-morrow."

"She is right," murmured Ethel, as, after her guest's departure, she resumed her seat; and, leaning her head on her hand, gave way to the indulgence of a melancholy revery. "Of what avail is it to dwell upon the past?—I wish I could forget!"

CHAPTER V.

AN INTERVIEW.

Why, life must mock itself to mark how small
Are the distinctions of its various pride.
'Tis strange how we delight in the unreal;
The fanciful and the fantastic make
One half our triumphs. Not in mighty things—
The glorious offerings of our mind to fate—
Do we ask homage to our vanities,
One half so much as from the false and vain:
The petty trifles that the social world
Has fancied into grandeur.

When a woman has once made up her mind to be imprudent, she is very imprudent indeed; she is quite ingenious in contriving occasions. Thanks to her age, and the interest of old friends of the family, Mrs. Churchill had escaped without punishment for her amateur treason; and now, whether emboldened by an impunity which she most untruly set down to the account of fear, or whether the late excitement made her present quiet insipid,—it would be difficult to say; but she was in a fret and fever to further prove what she called, her devotion to the House of Stuart.

Lord Marchmont would have expatiated for months to come on his own prudence in refusing admission into his house, could he have heard only a tithe of her daily discourse. Fortunately, two servants she had brought with her, were devotedly attached to their mistress; and the others only entering her apartments at rare intervals, did not understand her mystic allusions; and she now, more than ever, affected to veil her meaning under the mysterious phraseology so much adopted by the Jacobites.

One morning Ethel was surprised by a summons, unusually early, to her grandmother's room. She found her in the greatest bustle: two of the maids unpacking a multitude of trunks; while she walked up and down, now telling them where such a satin was to be found, and then reading a letter which she held in her hand. As soon as Ethel came in, she took her hand, and, without speaking, led her to the closet adjoining.

"I have," said she, "most important intelligence to communicate."

Her listener turned pale: could it be possible that Mr. Trevanion had come to London?

Mrs. Churchill, however, continued without noticing her agitation:—"I have this morning received an answer from her Grace of Buckingham. She appoints to-day for a private interview. The daughter of a king duly appreciates my humble services to her house."

"My dear madam!" exclaimed Ethel, "do you think it will be quite prudent, under your present circumstances, to visit a person whose Jacobite predilections are so well known as those of the Duchess of Buckingham?"

"I am not aware," returned her grandmother, drawing up herself to her full height, "what act you have ever observed in my whole life that authorises you to suppose I should allow prudence to interfere with duty? You will be ready to accompany me by twelve o'clock to-day."

Ethel knew that further remonstrance was useless; and, therefore, quietly offered her services to arrange the multitudinous wardrobe which was being unpacked.

Mrs. Churchill, always particular about her dress, was this morning more so than ever. Still, it must be confessed, that when the sad-coloured satin was arranged in rich folds, and the Mechlin lace (it was a little fortune in itself) hung to her satisfaction, she looked as perfect a specimen of an old lady as England could have produced.

The chairs came at the appointed hour, and Ethel could not but be amused at the glimpses she had of the park along which they were carried; although haunted by misgivings as to the judiciousness of their destination. They were set down in a hall of large dimensions, hung round with portraits, and filled with servants, who had more the air of guards. Two attendants marshalled them up-stairs, where they were received by two gentlemen ushers, who conducted them along a spacious gallery into an antechamber, where they were received by her grace's chamberlain. He sent in a page, richly dressed; and, after a message, mysteriously whispered in his ear, announced that her grace was ready to receive her guests. Two attendants, in court dresses, flung open the folding-doors of the room in which the duchess awaited their arrival. It was a long, high chamber: on the one side there was a number of narrow windows, whose curtains of crimson damask swept the floor, and gave a rich and subdued colour to the light that struggled through their massive folds; on the other side were pictures in huge

gilded frames, each with a crown on the top; for they were all family portraits of the Stuarts. At the end of the room was a canopy, surmounted by a ducal coronet. Below was a full-length of James II., at whose feet was a sort of throne, on which the duchess was placed. Six ladies, splendidly attired, were on either side, all standing; indeed, an arm-chair, placed near the throne, was the only seat to be seen in the room.

The duchess received them with a gracious inclination of the head; and, after signing to Mrs. Churchill to take the arm-chair, she extended her hand for Ethel to kiss. Silence was then broken by inquiring how Mrs. Churchill bore the fatigue of the journey?

"I never felt it," replied the old lady, who was elated with all the dignity of a martyr; "there are times when the mind forgets the body."

Ethel could not help smiling when she recollected how her grandmother had slept or grumbled the whole journey in her very comfortable carriage.

"We are not ignorant of your devotion," returned the duchess, with a very solemn air, suddenly checking herself, as if afraid of saying too much. But it is difficult to sustain conversation in such a high and forced tone, and neither party got further than a few stately sentences.

Ethel employed the time in observing the duchess. She could trace no likeness to the portrait by which she was seated; she was far handsomer, having retained, at least, the traces of her former beauty. She had fine high features: her eyes were rather small, and close to the nose, but bright and piercing; and the general severity of her aspect vanished under the influence of a very pleasant smile. She wore black; and, as the cumbrous drapery fell around her stately figure, contrasting with the dead paleness of her face (she had not worn rouge for years), there was something about her which gave more the idea of a picture than of a human being.

Apparently both the hostess and guest grew tired of maintaining the dignity of conspiracy; for, suddenly, the duchess rose and requested Mrs. Churchill's presence in her closet, and left Ethel, much longer than she liked, to be entertained by her ladies in waiting.

The duchess and Mrs. Churchill had known each other as girls; and it may be doubted whether they had not found some subject of conversation more amusing than even the downfall of the House of Hanover. At last a little page made his ap-

pearance, and stated, that Miss Churchill's company was requested by her grace. She followed her little guide through a number of galleries till she found herself in a large bed-chamber, by whose fireplace both Mrs. Churchill and the duchess were seated.

"I sent for you, my dear," said her grandmother, "that you might be as favoured as myself."

Both ladies rose with a mysterious air: and her grace, first carefully looking round, and then locking her door, touched a string in the wall. The panel flew back, and discovered a small secret chamber, hung with purple velvet, and lighted by one large lamp.

"It burns night and day," said her grace, entering, followed by her companions. The duchess then drew a curtain aside, which concealed a portrait of the Pretender. She dropped on her knee, and her example was followed by Mrs. Churchill, and also by Ethel, who consoled herself by thinking that if it was an act of treason, she could not help it. Perhaps there was most treason in the interest with which she gazed on the handsome and melancholy countenance of the prince, that wore the expression of sadness peculiar to his fated race.

"It is a hard fate," thought she, "to be exiled from so noble a heritage as England."

On a little stand, in the middle, was a large basket, filled with white roses; the duchess took one and gave it to her young companion. They left the chamber in silence; and, after seeing that the panel was properly secured,—

"I have got another portrait to show you," said her grace, in a tone from which every thing but deep sadness had vanished: "alas! ours is an ill-fated house!"

They followed her into another chamber, hung with black; and, beneath a sombre canopy, mocked by the ducal coronet above, was the portrait of her son—the young duke recently deceased. He was more like the Stuarts than his mother; but it was a soft, fair likeness. The same sad and sombre expression was united with almost feminine beauty. It was of a kind too fragile for lasting. The large blue eyes seemed full of light; but the lips were feverish, and the rich colour on the cheek, hectic.

"He was my only boy," said the duchess: and Ethel saw that the curved mouth was tremulous with suppressed emotion; and the eyes filled for a moment with unshed tears. After this, she had not even the inclination to smile at what her grace said

was the occupation of her leisure hours. She undrew a curtain, and there were two wax-work figures, arrayed in robes of state, glittering with tissue and embroidery. "They are destined, when finished, for Westminster Abbey," added his mother, with all her former stateliness.

They then adjourned to the reception-room: the duchess resumed her seat under the canopy; the damsels in waiting ranged themselves on either side; and a page brought in a massive gold salver, with chocolate, seed-cake, and canary. The refreshments over, they took their leave, were ushered in great form to their chairs, and arrived in safety at home; Ethel, at all events, completely tired.

But the events of the day were not over. News had arrived in London that Mr. Trevanion had effected his escape. This, coupled with Mrs. Churchill's indiscreet visit, led to more severe measures. She was placed under confinement, though allowed to remain in her own house, on account of her age; but menaced with a fine, which would, if enacted, bring beggary along with it.

CHAPTER VI.

A PROJECT.

The sun was setting o'er the sea,
  A beautiful and summer sun;
Crimson and bright, as if not night,
  But rather day had just begun:
That lighted sky, that lighted sea,
They spoke of Love and Hope to me.

I thought how Love, I thought how Hope,
  O'er the horizon of my heart
Had poured their light like yonder sun;
  Like yon sun, only to depart:
Alas! that ever suns should set,
Or Hope grow cold, or Love forget!

"I SEE no remedy!" exclaimed Henrietta, who had hurried to Ethel on the first intelligence of this new misfortune, "but a direct application to Sir Robert Walpole. I have tried every method to induce Lord Marchmont to exert himself, but in vain. I have reasoned, flattered, even cried; but all of no use.

But for a husband, one should never know how disagreeable people can be."

"Hush, my dearest Henrietta!" exclaimed Ethel.

"Ah! it is of no use finding fault with what I say; it is the truth."

"Which," interrupted her friend, "is not to be spoken at all times."

"Well, well," replied Henrietta, half laughing, "have your own way; which, by-the-by, is what you quiet people always contrive to get in some way or other."

"I have so much of my own way," replied Ethel, with a smile.

"Only with me," returned the other, laughing; "and, as it is a luxury, you make the most of it. But I'll tell you what my plan is: I shall take you, to-morrow, to Chelsea, and see if we cannot obtain an interview with Sir Robert himself, and then you can plead your own cause."

"But what could I say?" exclaimed Ethel, turning pale at the bare mention of such a scheme.

"Say! why, my dear, you need only look," cried Henrietta; "not but what you may very well find plenty to say. You can tell him that your grandmother is just a silly old lady, who will never do any one any harm but herself. You can also ask him to behead Mr. Trevanion if ever he sets foot in England again."

"Will you never be serious?" interrupted her listener.

"I am too sad to be serious," replied Lady Marchmont: "do you know what that mood is when you would rather dwell upon any thing but your own thoughts? I am always the most seemingly lively when I am the least so in reality; and I talk nonsense when I have not courage to talk sense. I make a noise, like children, because I am frightened at finding myself in the dark—that worst of darkness, the darkness of the heart."

"This from you!" exclaimed Ethel; "you, the brilliant, the flattered—"

"All very true," interrupted Henrietta; "but not the happy. Nature and fortune are at variance with me: the one meant me to be much better than I actually am. Every day I see more clearly the worthlessness and the vacancy of the life that I lead: my heart is chilled and hardened, and my mind frets itself. It is a dreadful feeling that of knowing you are not loved as you could love, and as you deserve to be loved, to know that all your highest and best qualities—"

"It is a dreadful thing," replied Ethel, with a shudder that

she could not repress: her heart had gone back to its own early dream, and dwelt the more heavily on its present desolation.

Real feeling is shy of expression; and neither of the friends had courage to speak of what was nearest the heart of either. Henrietta did not like to talk of Lord Marchmont, and to own how utterly she had been mistaken in believing that rank and wealth sufficed to make a happy marriage: she shamed to say how she craved for affection and sympathy. Ethel, on her part, was equally reluctant to speak of Norbourne Courtenaye; and this silence was aided by Henrietta, who, from a feeling of delicacy, did not like to speak of Constance. How much, even in the most confidential intercourse, is kept back! the dearest of friends know each other but little.

"But," continued Lady Marchmont, "let us speak seriously of my project; believe me, it is a good one. There, you need not say we think all projects good that originate in ourselves, I have said it for you."

"I really," exclaimed Ethel, "was not going to say any thing of the kind."

"Well, it is something to be prepared: it is what you must be to-morrow."

"But what possible influence can I have with Sir Robert?"

"Oh, a pretty woman always has influence; and they say that the all-powerful minister is as open to the charms of a pair of *beaux yeux* as any one."

"I shall feel so frightened, and so silly!"

"Never mind the last; only, instead of fear, have hope. Sir Robert is a widower, who knows what effect you may produce?"

"I have no ambition for such a conquest."

"That is because you are not yet come to a full use of your understanding. Universal conquest should be the motto of our sex. Every woman should try to make every man she sees in love with her."

"And what is she to do with all these lovers when she has them?"

"Why, not much; it is not every person who can be made useful: still, there they are if you want them. To make a man in love with you gives an instant hold on his vanity; and with that, you can do any thing. Vanity is the real lever with which Archimedes said he could move the earth; so, try what you can effect with Sir Robert."

"I fear that will not be much," replied Ethel, with a disconsolate air.

"At all events, look your very best; and I shall call for you about twelve. Remember, the most perfect toilet; men do not understand the detail of dress, but they appreciate the result. I shall go to bed, and dream all night that I am prime minister instead of Sir Robert."

She staid for no answer, but left Ethel all fear and hesitation; which, however, merged in the conviction that, though she might not be able to do any thing for her grandmother, at least she ought to try her utmost; and she had great confidence in her friend. Henrietta, like all persons of active mind and lively imagination, exercised great influence over all about her. It was difficult to resist both her warmth and her kindliness; the one carried you along with her, the other made it quite ungrateful not to be so carried.

CHAPTER VII.

CHANGES IN LONDON.

The presence of perpetual change
  Is ever on the earth;
To-day is only as the soil
  That gives to-morrow birth.

Where stood the tower, there grows the weed;
  Where stood the weed, the tower:
No present hour its likeness leaves
  To any future hour.

Of each imperial city built
  Far on the Eastern plains,
A desert waste of tomb and sand
  Is all that now remains.

Our own fair city filled with life,
  Has yet a future day,
When power, and might, and majesty,
  Will yet have passed away.

Nothing could be more bright than the following morning: it was the first day of sunshine that Ethel had seen since her arrival in London, and she was surprised to observe the change that it wrought. The river below her windows shone with that

deep, dead clearness, which somewhat resembles molten lead; the little boats glided rapidly past; and more than one song, set to some popular old tune, came from the watermen as they rowed past. The sails of many a small vessel seemed like snow, and nothing could be more graceful than the way in which they glided through the arches of the distant bridge—disappeared—and then might again be recognised in the bend of the stream above. The noble dome of St. Paul's seemed bathed in the golden atmosphere, and the spires of the inferior churches glittered below.

Ethel wondered what had become of the gloom which struck her so forcibly on her first arrival. In the direction to which her own hopes pointed, the aspect was even more cheerful. The banks of the Thames had gardens intermixed with the buildings, and the architecture was of lighter character, while the beautiful old Abbey rose like a queen amid her court. Unless we except the Tiber, there is no river which has so much history about it as the Thames, and which is so strongly impressed with the chracteristics of its nation. There are the signs of that commercial activity which has carried the flag of England round the world; there is that cleaving to the past, which has preserved those stately churches inviolate—the glorious receptacles of the dead—and there, too, is evidence of that domestic spirit which goes back upon itself for enjoyment, and garners up its best hopes in a little space. England may be deficient in public gardens, but where are there so many private ones, each the delight of their master, and the household that have planted their shrubs, and watered their flowers? What little worlds of affection and comfort are bounded by the neat quickset-hedge, quiet and still as the nest of some singing-bird!

Ethel was in that sensitive state of mind and body, which is especially subject to external influences, and she began her toilet with a cheerfulness that had its origin in the sun shining in at the window. What children we are in trifles! what slight things exercise an influence over us! to how much that our reason would be ashamed to acknowledge! nevertheless does it submit. Our whole nature must change; we must be less susceptible, less dependent on "blind accident," before we can shake off hopes and fears, which are almost superstitious.

For a wonder, two ladies were actually punctual to an appointment: Lady Marchmont was to her time, and Ethel did not keep her waiting a moment. A woman's first look is at

the dress of her friend, and her second word is of it. Each was exceedingly satisfied with the other; which is also saying, that they were exceedingly satisfied with themselves. Lady Marchmont had on a rich flowered damask, and a white chip hat tied down with a pink kerchief; and never had she looked handsomer, for she was one whose variable complexion and mobile features were made to express interest and excitement. Ethel was in mourning: they had judged it the most fitting habit for a petitioner; it was certainly one most becoming to the wearer. The black set off the pure white skin and the gloss of the golden hair, and it suited the pensive and subdued expression that had become habitual to Ethel's sweet countenance.

A drive to Chelsea was a very different thing in those day to what it is in ours; it was then literally going out of town, and the huge coach-and-six made its stately way beneath old trees, and through green and shady lanes. I cannot say much for the cheerfulness of Chelsea nowadays: it would seem as if past gayety always flung a deeper shadow over the places where it held sway. The large old houses, darkened with many years, have a gloomy appearance; and the chances of the present day are, that they have transmigrated into boarding-schools and madhouses. No vestige remains of that luxuriant growth of almond-trees, for which it was formerly celebrated. There is something peculiarly lovely in the almond-blossom; it brings the warmth of the rose on the last cold airs of winter, a rich and glowing wreath, when all beside is desolate: so frail, too, and so delicate, like a fairy emblem of those sweet and gentle virtues whose existence is first known in an hour of adversity. High brick walls stand where once stood that rosy and graceful tree; and if there be one object more dreary than another, it is a high, blank brick wall: as little vestige is there left of the wide-spread common.

Small houses have sprung up as rapidly as the summer grasses used to spring in the Five Fields, so notorious for robbery and murder, that even Madame de Genlis, not usually very accurate in her English *locale*, is perfectly right in making them the scene of a robber's attack.

"Troy now stands where grass once grew," to take the liberty of reversing a quotation, and Belgrave square has effaced the terrors of "The Five Fields;" but the road to Sir Robert Walpole's lay more to the right; yet so much are places brought together, and distances shortened nowadays, that a visit to Chelsea was about what a visit to Richmond would be now. It was a very pleasant morning, the clear blue sky

was only broken by large white clouds, whose contrast deepened the azure into purple. The trees lay on one side the road in a rich depth of shadow; on the other the golden light seemed to rain through the chequered boughs: a subtle fragrance floated on the air, and the carols of a thousand birds rose distinct above the deep murmur of the city that they had left behind.

"I cannot help," said Ethel, "feeling in better spirits: it seems absolute ingratitude not to enjoy so lovely a morning!"

"I shall consider them as an omen," replied Lady Marchmont: "it is very becoming to be in good spirits, and I want you to look your best. Really you ought to keep a relay of tenth cousins to die off, for black suits you remarkably well. We shall be such good contrasts; I am so glad that I have left off my mourning!"

"Your mourning!" exclaimed Ethel; "I was not aware that you had been wearing it. Who was it for?"

Lady Marchmont coloured, both with embarrassment and self-reproach. Embarrassment; for, with an intuitive delicacy, she had shrunk from ever naming Mrs. Courtenaye to Ethel; and, with self-reproach, that, in a moment's carelessness, she could have so lightly alluded to such a painful subject. Perhaps it was best to tell Ethel at once: if ever she went into society at all, she would inevitably hear of it, and her own concealment would have the appearance of a dissimulation,—the furthest from her thoughts. Yes, it was best to tell Ethel at once.

"I have not," said Lady Marchmont, "told you of the friendship that existed between Mrs. Courtenaye and myself, for I felt that the subject must be a painful one to you."

How painful, the deadly paleness that overspread Ethel's face, sufficiently told. Henrietta would not observe it, but went on with her story, thus giving her friend time to recover; and, before it was done, both were mingling their tears together.

"I have avoided the subject myself," said Ethel at last, in a faltering tone; "even now it is most painful to say what I think of Mr. Norbourne's conduct: it was too cruel!"

"Do not," interrupted Henrietta, "expect the shadow of an excuse from me. It was the resentment that I felt towards himself that, singularly enough, led to my acquaintance with his wife: and I say it, even to yourself, that if ever there was an angel upon earth, it was Constance Courtenaye."

"What a strange thing it is for affection to change!" said Ethel: "even now I cannot comprehend inconstancy in love."

"I do not think," returned Henrietta, "that there was any inconstancy in the case: we must look to more worldly motives. Constance was a creature that grew upon your love, but no rival to yourself. I take it for granted that the Courtenaye property was involved, and that its heir had no means of freeing himself but by a marriage with his cousin."

"He must have known that before he knew me," said Ethel, coldly.

"I am not," exclaimed Lady Marchmont, "seeking to defend conduct as heartless as it was cruel. Your youth, your ignorance of the world, your touching confidence in himself, should have made your happiness too sacred for a moment's trifling. But we live in a hard and unkind world, and every hour I see some new proof of how little we regard the feelings of each other; and, strange it is, that the deepest injuries are those that are the most lightly judged. The strong hand of the law is around your life and your wealth, but he who takes from you all that renders them valuable, the chances are, that his offence will find palliation and excuse; nay, that the laughers will be on his side. The heart is left alone in its desolation!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SIR ROBERT WALPOLE AND HOUSE.

This is the charm of poetry: it comes
On sad perturbed moments; and its thoughts,
Like pearls amid the troubled waters, gleam.
That which we garnered in our eager youth,
Becomes a long delight in after years:
The mind is strengthened, and the heart refreshed
By some old memory of gifted words,
That bring sweet feelings, answering to our own,
Or dreams that waken some more lofty mood
Than dwelleth with the commonplace of life.

THE two friends were roused from the sad and subdued mood into which they had gradually sunk, by the sudden stoppage of the carriage at the entrance to Sir Robert Walpole's house. The arrival took them by surprise: Ethel, who had quite lost the passing cheerfulness of the morning, turned yet paler, but Lady Marchmont was at once aroused by the

excitement of the coming interview; as she afterwards said, laughing, she felt what her beauty owed to itself!

"I have a friend at court," whispered she to her companion: "last night I singled out one of Sir Robert's secretaries, and a few smiles made him my devoted chevalier, and he promised to insure an interview."

So saying, she gave a small billet to one of the servants; and almost before they had time to look at each other, and to see that neither ringlet nor riband was displaced by their long drive, down came the young secretary. He handed them from the carriage with an air of devoted gallantry, and led them to a small breakfast-room, which overlooked the garden.

"Here," said he, "I must leave you, while I ascertain whether Sir Robert will not be too proud to receive the loveliest lady in England!"

"Now, honour and glory to *la haute science de la coquetterie!* My rank, though I own that it is a very pretty thing to be a countess, would have done nothing for me in this case; my wealth, no more; for despite of the opposition, I do not think Sir Robert would have allowed me to offer a pair of diamond earrings, even with his favourite daughter in the background; but I flung myself on a woman's best prerogative, and *mes beaux yeux* have settled the matter at once for me. Ethel, why don't you thank me for having made such good use of them?"

Pale and agitated, Ethel could scarcely force a smile; and, to divert her attention from the dreaded interview, Lady Marchmont began to notice the objects around them. The window opened towards a most lovely garden, whose smooth turf and gorgeous parterres swept down to the river. A peacock stood on the grass lawn, his brilliant plumage expanded in the sunshine, while every movement showed some change of colour. Beyond, as if to show the infinite variety of beauty, floated two swans; they were coming to shore, in the full glory of their arching necks and snowy wings. No marvel that the ancient Greeks, who never lost an image of loveliness, linked them to the chariot of the Queen of Beauty!

"A swan," said Lady Marchmont, "always gives the idea of a court-lady,—stately in her grace, ruffling in her bravery, and conscious of the floating plumes that mark her pretensions. The peacock is a coquette; it turns in the sunshine, it looks round as if to ask the conscious air of its purple and gold: but the swan sails on in majestic tranquillity, it sees the fair image of its perfect grace on the waters below, and is content:

'It seeks not the applause of vulgar eyes.'"

"And which of these," asked Ethel, "do you consider to be your prototype?"

"Oh, a happy mixture of both!" returned the young countess, laughing: "it is the greatest mistake possible, to be always the same; I appeal to the high authority of Pope:—

'Ladies, like tulips, in the sunshine show,
'Tis to variety their charms they owe!'

The swan is a particularly well-bred bird, it has a proper court and reception manner; but there are times when you may well permit yourself the airs and graces of the peacock. Indeed, I think a very pretty system of ornithology might be got up for the use of our sex; you, for example, have taken your lessons of the dove!"

"Thank you!" returned her companion.

"You would say to your lover,

'I disdain
All pomp when thou art by: far be the noise
Of kings and courts from us, whose gentle souls
Our kindly stars have steered another way.
Free as the forest-doves, we'll pair together,
Flee to the arbours, grots, and flowery meads,
And in soft murmurs interchange our souls;
Together drink the crystal of the stream,
Or taste the yellow fruit which autumn brings;
And when the golden evening calls us home,
Wing to our downy nest, and sleep till morn.'"

"I do not believe I should say any thing," replied Ethel; "I am naturally silent."

"Well," exclaimed Lady Marchmont, "there is a great deal to be urged in favour of a woman's silence; still,

'Speech is morning to the mind;
It spreads the beauteous images abroad,
Which else lie furled and clouded in the soul.'

I do not know the reason," continued Henrietta, "but whenever I am very anxious about any thing, and I am, indeed, anxious now, my memory, by way of passing the time, always seems to fill with what were its earliest delights. How well I remember the old dark-looking volumes, from which my uncle used to evoke such beautiful creation! How real they

then seemed to be! How devoutly I believed in these ethereal creations! Love, hope, and happiness, then appeared to me actual existences. Alas! as Lady Mary says, 'To my extreme mortification, I grow wiser every day!'"

"I do not know," said Ethel, with a deep sigh, "whether I am wiser, but I am not happier than I used to be; I am not so happy!"

"The future owes you recompense," answered her companion; "at all events, there is a great deal of pleasure before you, if you come out as a beauty and an heiress: I trust that Sir Robert will decree that you shall be set in gold!"

"Let him give my poor old grandmother liberty, and I care for nothing else!"

"Well," cried Henrietta, "do not look so pale and wo-begone about it,

> 'As some fair tulip, by a storm oppressed,
> Shrinks up, and folds its silken arms to rest;
> And, bending to the blast all pale and dead,
> Hears from within the winds sing round its nest.
> So shrouded up, your beauty disappears;
> Unveil, my love! and lay aside your fears.'"

At that very moment the door opened, and the young secretary announced that Sir Robert Walpole would be happy to receive them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INTERVIEW.

> "Go see Sir Robert!
> *P.*—See Sir Robert! hum—
> And never laugh, for all my life to come!
> Seen him I have, but in his happier hour
> Of social pleasure ill-exchanged for power;
> Seen him encumbered with a venal tribe,
> Smile without art, and win without a bribe.
> Would he oblige me? Let me only find
> He does not think me what he thinks mankind.
> Come, come! at all I laugh he laughs, no doubt;
> The only difference is, I dare laugh out!"—POPE.

It was a small, but luxurious room, the open windows of which looked to a garden sloping down to the river, clear and

sunny, as if the metropolis had been an hundred miles away. Pots, crowded with rare and fragrant exotics, were on the terrace, and filled the apartment with their odours, and the walls around were hung with some of the choicest productions of the Italian school of art: the eye could not be raised but it must look on a flower or a picture. In the midst stood a table, covered with papers tied up with red tape, books of accounts, and open letters. At one end, that facing the window, sat England's all-powerful minister, wrapped in a loose morning gown of purple cloth. He was a man of large size, in an indolent attitude, and with that flushed complexion which usually accompanies excess. At the first glance, you only saw one who appeared the idle and good-humoured voluptuary, whose chief attention was given to decide on the merit of rival clarets, and whose chief care was to ward off an attack of the gout. Not such was the impression produced by a second and more scrutinizing look, or when the face before you was lighted by expression. There was decision on the firmly compressed lip, whose subtle smile spoke a world of sarcasm; there was thought on the bold, high forehead, and the mind kindled the depths of those piercing gray eyes.

Sir Robert Walpole was essentially the man of his time: no other minister could have maintained the House of Hanover on its then tottering throne. It was opposed to the principles of the many, and entwined with the picturesque prejudices of none. The two first Georges were not men to either dazzle or to interest a people. They were narrow-minded foreign soldiers, fettered by the small etiquettes of small courts; and looked on their accession to the British throne rather as coming into a large property, than as entering on a high and responsible office.

Sir Robert Walpole saw at once that loyalty and enthusiasm must be put out of the question; the appeal must be made to common sense, and to self-interest. A man with less worldly shrewdness would never have seen how things really stood; a man with less pliability could never have adapted himself to them. It must always be remembered, that his whole administration was one long struggle: he had to maintain his master on the throne, and himself in the ministry; and this was done by sheer force of talent. He had no alliance among the great nobility on the one hand; and, at all events at first, was no personal favourite with the sovereign on the other; yet he kept his high post through one of the longest and most prosperous administrations that England

has ever known. His faults were those of his day, a day singularly deficient in all high moral attributes.

Disbelief in excellence is the worst soil in which the mind can work; we must believe, before we can hope. The political creed, of which expediency is the alpha and the omega, can never know the generous purpose, or the high result. It sees events through a microscope; the detail is accurate, but the magnificent combination, and the glorious distance, are wholly lost. His age looked not beyond to-day; it forgot what it had received from the past, and what it owed to the future. Rochefoucald says, and most truly, that hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue; now, in Walpole's time, it was not worth vice's while to pay even the poor homage of hypocrisy. Political virtue was laughed at; or, at best, considered a sort of Utopian dream that no one was bound to realize. Human interest will always mingle with human motive. To this hour, the great science and duty of politics is lowered by the petty leaven of small and personal advantage; still, no one can deny the vast advance that has been made. Our views are loftier, because more general; and individual selfishness is corrected by the knowledge, that good is only to be worked out on a large scale. The many have taken the place of the few; and and a great principle gives something of its own strength to the mind that entertains it.

The union of philanthropy and of political science belongs to our own age: every hour the conviction is gaining ground, that happiness should be the object of legislation; and that power is given for responsibility, not for enjoyment. Power is a debt to the people: but as yet we walk with the leading-strings of prejudice, strong to confine the steps, which they never should attempt to guide. Let the child and the nation alike feel their own way; the very stumbles will teach not only caution, but their own strength to recover from them. There is a long path yet before us; but the goal, though distant, is glorious. The time may come, when that intelligence, which is the sunshine of the moral world, will, like the sunshine of the physical world, kindle for all. There will be no tax on the window-lights of the mind. Ignorance, far more than idleness, is the mother of all the vices; and how recent has been the admission, that knowledge should be the portion of all? The destinies of the future lie in judicious education; an education that must be universal, to be beneficial.

The state of the poor in our own country is frightful; and

ask any one in the habit of coming in contact with the lower classes, to what is this distress mainly attributable? The answer will always be the same—the improvidence of the poor. But, in what has this improvidence originated?—in the neglect of their superiors. The poor have been left in that state of wretched ignorance, which neither looks forward nor back; to them, as to the savages, the actual moment is every thing: they have never been humanised by enjoyment, nor subdued by culture.

The habits of age are hopeless, but how much may be done with the children? Labour, and severe labour, is, in some shape or other, the inevitable portion of mankind; but there is no grade that has not its moments of mental relaxation, if it but know how to use them. Give the children of the poor that portion of education which will enable them to know their own resources; which will cultivate in them an onward-looking hope, and give them rational amusement in their leisure hours: this, and this only, will work out that moral revolution, which is the legislator's noblest purpose. One great evil of highly civilised society is, the immense distance between the rich and the poor; it leads, on either side, to a hardened selfishness. Where we know little, we care little; but the fact once admitted, that there can be neither politically nor morally a good which is not universal, that we cannot reform for a time, or for a class, but for all and for the whole, and our very interests will draw us together in one wide bond of sympathy. A mighty change and, I believe, improvement, is at this moment going on in the world; but the revolution, to work out its great and best end, must be even more moral than political, though the one inevitably leads to the other. Nothing can be permitted to the few; rights and advantages were sent for all: but the few were at the fountain-head in Sir Robert Walpole's time. It is but justice to him to note how much he was in its advance. Nothing could be more enlightened than the encouragement he gave to our manufactories and colonies. Look, also, at his steady preservation of peace; what rest and what prosperity he gave to England. The great want of administration was, as we have said before, the want of high principle: it was the ideal of common sense, but it was nothing more. Now, mere common sense never does any thing great; the noblest works of our nature, its exertions, its sacrifices, need some diviner prompting: the best efforts of humanity belong to enthusiasm; but Sir Robert's was not the age of enthusiasm. The revolution, and the exile of the Stuarts,

seemed to have exhausted that ardour, and that poetry, which are essentially the characteristics of English history: the chivalric, the picturesque, and the romantic, were put aside for a time to awaken into the higher hope, and more general enthusiasm of the present. The best proof of their exalting presence a[illegible] us is, that we believe and hope, where our grandfather[illegible]uled and doubted. But we are keeping the fair petitioners waiting; a fault Sir Robert himself would not have committed.

CHAPTER X.

AN AUDIENCE.

> Not with the world to teach us, may we learn
> The spirit's noblest lessons. Hope and Faith
> Are stars that shine amid the far off heaven,
> Dimmed and obscured by vapours from below;
> Impatient selfishness, and shrewd distrust,
> Are taught us in the common ways of life;
> Dust is beneath our feet and at our side
> The coarse and mean, the false and the unjust;
> And constant contact makes us grow too like
> The things we daily struggle with and scorn:
> Only by looking up, can we see heaven.

Sir Robert gave one quick scrutinizing glance as his fair guests entered, which was succeeded by the prolonged look of extreme admiration; he called up his most courteous manner as he pointed to the seats nearest to his own.

"I never," said he, "wished my gout with my enemies so cordially as I do at this moment."

"Nay," replied Lady Marchmont, "I cannot help feeling obliged to it; at all events, you cannot seek safety in flight. We have stormed your stronghold, and you must yield yourself our prisoner, rescue or no rescue!"

"Not so bad as that, either," exclaimed Walpole; "I would not fly, if I could:

> 'Old as I am, for ladies' love unfit,
> The power of beauty I remember yet!'"

"I trust," returned Henrietta, with a glance at the silent

and confused Ethel, "that we shall find you a very slave to its influence."

Sir Robert smiled, and then said, in a good-humoured tone, "Well, now, fair ladies, what do you want with me? for, I suppose, you are no exceptions to the general rule; no one ever comes to me who does not want something."

"Well, replied the young countess, "you would not have us unlike every body else in the world?"

"That is what you already are!" said the minister, with an air of great gallantry.

"To be frank," continued Lady Marchmont, having first appropriated the compliment with a very sweet smile, "we do come to ask a favour!"

"Now, the Lord have mercy on me!" exclaimed Sir Robert, sinking back in his chair; "there is nothing in the world so unreasonable as a pretty woman. Well, let me hear what outrageous proposition is about to come from two at once!" and he half hummed through his teeth the air then in its zenith of popularity:—

> "How happy could I be with either,
> Were t'other dear charmer away!"

"Nay," said Lady Marchmont, "we trust that our petition will not be so very outrageous, either. But, will you allow me to introduce my companion, Miss Churchill?"

Sir Robert's brow darkened at once; but there was something in Ethel's pale and subdued loveliness, which softened him; for he asked, in a very kind tone, "And what does Miss Churchill want with me?"

"Pity and pardon!" exclaimed Ethel, in a low, but distinct whisper.

"I thought how it was," cried Walpole, "those fantastic coxcombs have all the luck with you. Here is a goose—by Jove! I am calumniating that respectable bird: Trevanion has not even the brains of a goose—an idiot tries to unsettle a whole kingdom, does contrive to turn the heads of some worthy people, and here, are two of the prettiest women in England coming to beg for his head, as if it were worth keeping on his shoulders!"

"You are quite wrong," interrupted Lady Marchmont; "as far as Mr. Trevanion is concerned, you have our full permission to hang him out of the way at your earliest convenience!"

"You only say this," returned Sir Robert, fixing a penetrat-

ing glance on Ethel, to whose cheek the colour rose vividly, "because you know he has escaped! The jailer was fool enough to have a daughter, and she was fool enough to think, because a man was handsome, he ought not to be hanged; so they took advantage of a dark night, and a smuggler's boat, and are gone to France and the devil together! Don't faint, at least, not here!" added he abruptly, to Ethel, whose fading blush left her paler than before: "your lover is not more inconstant than all men are: but I see how it is; women are all alike, they would rather have a lover hanged, than that another should save him from the gallows!"

A quick temper feeds on its own indulgence, and Sir Robert had talked himself into being angry; however, Lady Marchmont took advantage of the pause to say, "Mr. Trevanion has nothing to do with our visit; it is on Mrs. Churchill's account that we ventured to address you. We have heard that she is to be imprisoned: it is for her sake that we implore your compassion!"

"My grandmother," exclaimed Ethel, eagerly, "pines for her own home: I am sure a prison will kill her. Consider, sir, she is an old woman, she will not trouble you long!"

"An old woman!" exclaimed the minister, whom an unlucky twinge made at that moment doubly impatient, "old women are the plague of my life! So I am to send Mrs. Churchill down to the very spot where a treasonable correspondence is most easily managed; and by the ease with which she gets out of a first scrape, give her all possible encouragement to get into another. Well, I was quite right in asking what preposterous request had you come here about!"

"I see," returned Lady Marchmont, "that old women are no favourites of yours; but if you would extend your clemency to Mrs. Churchill, I think she has seen her folly, and will leave conspiracies to themselves in future."

"And who," asked Sir Robert, "will become sureties for her future good conduct?"

"This appeared an easy question to answer; and from the early friends of their house, Ethel selected two neighbouring gentlemen, to whom she had always been accustomed to look with the utmost respect. She could scarcely have made a worse selection, for they were two most notorious Jacobites. The moment Sir Robert heard the names, "Really, this is too bad!" exclaimed he in a rage, ringing a bell violently that

stood by him on the table: "ladies, I can waste no more time in listening to any such nonsense. Good morning!"

There was no resource, the minister would not even look towards them, so absorbed had he suddenly become in the papers before him. The door opened; and, in another moment, they found themselves in the vestibule, where the young secretary was waiting to hand them to the carriage. He was too accustomed to discontented suitors not to see at a glance that the interview had been one of disappointment, and he was too discreet to ask any questions; a discretion, by-the-by, of all kinds the rarest.

CHAPTER XI.

A FRIEND AT COURT.

I did not know till she was lost,
How much she was beloved;
She knows it in that better world
To which she is removed.

I feel as she had only sought
Again her native skies;
I look upon the heavens, and seem
To meet her angel eyes.

Pity, and love, and gentle thoughts,
For her sake, fill my mind;
They are the only part of her
That now is left behind.

The disappointed petitioners stood, for a few moments, on the terrace while waiting for their carriage: they stood in complete silence; Ethel the most vexed, Lady Marchmont the most surprised. Henrietta felt like a dethroned divinity, refusal and rebuff were such very novel things to her, excepting from her husband; and from husbands they come as matters of course. But she was a petted, spoiled beauty; and to be dismissed in such an unceremonious manner was beyond her comprehension: she no longer wondered that Lord Marchmont was in opposition. As for Ethel, she was quite bewildered: she had felt such implicit reliance on Henrietta's success, that the disappointment was doubly bitter, because wholly unexpected.

They had stood both so completely absorbed in their disagreeable reverie, that neither perceived the approach of a stranger, who was about to pass them with a slight but courteous bow, when he caught sight of Hentrietta, and immediately stopped.

"This is an unexpected pleasure!" exclaimed he. "What good fortune blows Lady Marchmont hither?"

"Good fortune, do you call it?" cried Henrietta: "why I can scarcely refrain from venting my rage even upon poor, unoffending you. Good! my Lord; don't expect even a civil word from me. It is a very disagreeable thing to agree with one's husband; but to-night I move my patches, and become Tory."

"Nay," replied Lord Norbourne, for he was the stranger, "Sir Robert can have done nothing to merit so severe a sentence. Come, let me hear your grievance. He has bought some picture you wanted, or refused a slip from some plant, without which, of course, you cannot exist for an hour?"

"Dear Lord Norbourne," said Henrietta, "my business is of a much more serious nature. I leave it to your own kindness whether it shall or not be intruded upon you."

"Lady Marchmont knows," replied he, "that it is no commonplace expression of civility, when I say, let me have the happiness of serving you whether it be in a little or great thing."

"I equally know that I may take you at your word," said Henrietta; "and, as a first step, as it is her history that I am about to tell, will you allow me to introduce my young friend? Miss Churchill, Lord Norbourne."

It would be difficult to say on which party the name of the other produced the greatest effect. With Ethel there was the one association: this, then, was Courtenaye's uncle, whose daughter he had married. The whole past rose vividly before her—all her sorrow, all her suffering. The tears started, but pride repressed them: or, rather, pride is no name for the sensitive and shrinking feeling which trembles even at compassion for its misery. It was very painful to Ethel to seek aid from Lord Norbourne. Had she consulted her own wishes, she would have withdrawn at once; but it was a sacred duty to advance her grandmother's cause by every possible means: and, moreover, was not the listener in complete ignorance of the agitation he caused by his presence? She little knew how well Lord Norbourne was acquainted with her name; or how

large a share he had had in her unhappiness. Her appearance produced on him an emotion which even his calm and polished manner could scarcely conceal. She brought to him the image of Constance; thus at once unlocking the spring of his kindliest and best feelings. He felt at once what he owed of amends to the young and fair creature, whose beauty wore such obvious trace of suffering—of suffering, too, that he had inflicted. His better nature was awakened on her behalf; he longed to serve her, to be kind to her; he felt as if such service and such kindness were a worthy offering to the memory of his own angel child. Unconscious of all this, Lady Marchmont was equally surprised and delighted to find what interest Lord Norbourne took in her story. Like all women who seem to have an imperative necessity in their nature to give a romantic reason for every thing, she began to think that his lordship had suddenly fallen in love with the beautiful girl to whose cause he was giving such earnest attention.

"Well," said Lord Norbourne, as Henrietta concluded her narrative, "I trust that Lady Marchmont will not be driven to the desperate necessity of agreeing with her husband, even in politics. Just walk round the lawn for two or three minutes, and let me try my influence with Sir Robert."

He left them without, waiting; and Henrietta, after following him with eyes that looked the most eloquent thanks, turned to her companion, exclaiming,—

"I cannot say much for the success of my first scheme, that you should be the second Lady Walpole; but what do you say to being the third Lady Norbourne? but, I warn you, in the last case we shall be rivals."

The expression of Ethel's face quite checked her vivacity. For the first time it struck Lady Marchmont how much her friend was altered. Ethel had not even heard what she said, so completely was she lost in her own thoughts. She leaned against the balustrade of the terrace, her gaze fixed on the river, but seeing it not. The flush of excitement had left her deadly pale: while the blue eyes looked unnaturally large, with a sad set expression, as if haunted by the perpetual presence of one oppressive thought. Henrietta felt, whose image was present to Ethel: she said nothing; but pressing her companion's arm kindly, drew her onwards, and walked along the terrace in silence. But Henrietta's imagination was too acute and too buoyant not to arrange a whole future during their walk. She reconciled Ethel and Courtenaye; she gave

Lord Norbourne's consent to their marriage; and was just ending like a fairy tale, with—"and they lived very happy for the rest of their lives," when Lord Norbourne returned.

"I expect a charming welcome," said he, "for I return successful: Sir Robert relents. I have offered to become security that Mrs. Churchill has done with treasonable correspondence. She will not yet be permitted to return to the Manor House: it is too convenient for 'treasons, stratagems,' &c.; and it is as well not to be put in the way of temptation: but she will be allowed perfect liberty in London. Something of a fine is still talked of; but even that, I hope, will be remitted."

"How kind you are!" exclaimed Lady Marchmont; but Ethel found no voice to speak. Lord Norbourne took her hand very kindly, and placed her in the carriage.

"You must allow me," said he, "to call on Mrs. Churchill. I flatter myself I shall be able to convince her that, without compromising her principles, the best thing that she can do will be not to attempt carrying them into practice."

He turned down the very terrace where they had just been walking; and though, certainly, there was as little resemblance as could well be between himself and Lady Marchmont, yet their thoughts flowed in precisely the same channel. Chilled and hardened, as it had been, by constant contact with the world, yet Lord Norbourne's was inherently a high and generous nature. To such, atonement is a necessity and an enjoyment. Ethel's happiness seemed to him like a sad sweet debt, owing to the memory of his lost Constance.

CHAPTER XII.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE DEAD.

Who are the Spirits watching by the dead?
Faith, from whose eyes a solemn light is shed:
And Hope, with far-off sunshine on the head.

The influence of the dead is that of Heaven;
To it a majesty of power is given,
Working on earth with a diviner leaven.

To them belongs all high and holy thought:
The mind, whose mighty empire they have wrought;
And grief, whose comfort was by angels brought.

And gentle Pity comes, and brings with her
Those pensive dreams that their own light confer;
While Love stands watching by the sepulchre.

Confidence is inseparable from human nature. Never was temper so reserved but it has its moments of unbending—moments when the full heart unlocks its secret fountains, and tells of emotions unsuspected, and thoughts hitherto concealed by the guarded brow and practised lip. Now, of all times and places calculated for confidence, there is no time like evening; no place like sitting over the fire.

Much may be said in favour of a long walk on a summer twilight; the heart opens to the soft influences of the lovely hour; but those very influences distract us from ourselves. The eye is caught by the presence of the beautiful: the violets, half hidden in the long grass; a branch of hawthorn, heavy with its fragrant load; a cloud, on which the crimson shadow lingers to the last:—these are too fair to be passed by unnoticed; they take us from our discourse with a half unconscious delight. Moreover, before the calm and subduing aspect of nature, human cares feel their own vanity. The lulling music of leaves, stirred only by the gentle wind, enters into the soul; and the sweet, deep drawn breath brings its own tranquillity. Passionate and present, indeed, must be the despair that resists the harmony of such an hour; but the quiet chamber, and the secluded hearth, have an atmosphere of another kind. The objects around have been seen

so often that they have at last become, as it were, unseen; their familiarity does not carry us out of ourselves, for all their associations are our own. They remind us of nothing in which we were not the principal actors; if they call up the image of a friend, they call up our own also. Not a chair nor a table but has some link with our by-gone hours. Here we read, modifying the thought of others with our own; there we wrote; and how much is implied in that little phrase! how the whole world of inward existence passes before us, while putting only a small portion of it on paper! With how much is every letter combined, whether of business, or of affection! The room is filled with the ghosts of departed hours, often unnoticed and unremembered; but, when recalled by some chance circumstance, how vivid, and how distinct do they rise upon the memory!

The chamber in which Lord Norbourne was seated, was especially one of this kind; it had been his own room for years, and was crowded with all that marked his character and his taste. It was not large, but of unusual height, and fitted up with great costliness. The bookcases were ebony, inlaid with green morocco, and so were the tables, and the curtains were of crimson velvet. They were closely drawn, but you could hear a gentle rain beating against the window panes. There were few pictures, but each a masterpiece. A sunny landscape of Claude Lorraine's, contrasted the stormy darkness of one by Salvator Rosa; while the spiritual loveliness of a "Madonna," by Guido, was opposed to the passionate beauty of a "Fornarini," by Raphael. Only one modern picture was admitted, and that was a likeness of Constance, painted under her father's especial instructions. It was not taken in the dress of the time; but a loose white robe was gathered in with a few simple folds at the waist. The long hair of the palest gold was just parted on the forehead, and then fell unbound to the waist. Not an ornament of any kind was introduced, only one white thin hand held a bunch of lilies. The likeness was very strong; and the artist had caught, with great felicity, the sweet expression, the purity and the fragility which were Constance's great charm. You believed in angels as you gazed upon her face. On either side of the hearth sat Lord Norbourne and Mr. Courtenaye; they had dined together, and the wine and fruit still stood on the small table drawn between them, where strawberries and cherries were not in strict accordanse with the cheerful fire. But Lord Norbourne was greatly in advance of his age, and, as to the matter of that, of our own. He had no vague, false

notions of beginning fires in November, and ending them in May; but had arrived at the philosophical conclusion, that there are very few evenings, in all the year, that a fire is not a consummation of domestic felicity in England most devoutly to be wished.

Norbourne had been exerting himself to amuse his uncle, but with little success; and the conversation languished till the servants had left the room.

"I have seemed very ungracious," said Lord Norbourne; "but I am too much occupied with one subject to be able to talk of any other."

"What is it?" exclaimed Courtenaye: "I will, at least, promise to be an attentive listener."

"That I do not doubt," replied his uncle, with a forced smile; "for I am going to talk about your marrying again."

Norbourne coloured; and, after a moment's silence, said,—

"This is a very painful subject. For both our sakes, might it not be avoided."

"No," returned the other; "the confidence that now exists between us, and to which I cling as the last happiness of my life, must be unbroken by even the shadow of a restraint. Would you wish it otherwise, Norbourne?"

"My dearest uncle!" exclaimed his listener.

"We shall feel more at ease," continued Lord Norbourne, "when each fully understands the feelings of the other. I have shrunk, I own, from the subject; but an interview that I had this morning induces me to defer it no longer. I saw Miss Churchill to-day."

"Ethel!" exclaimed Norbourne, his strong and uncontrollable emotion betraying the power that her name still had over him: he tried to say something more, but the words died on his lips.

"I never saw so lovely a creature," continued his uncle: "I do not now wonder that you found it so hard to forgive me. Ah, I was wrong, very wrong!"

"My dear uncle," interrupted the other, "let there be some remembrances buried for ever in oblivion between us."

"Not yet," returned Lord Norbourne. "I feel what I owe you; the future must repay the past."

"I cannot bear you to speak thus," interrupted Courtenaye. "When I think of that gentle creature whose sweet eyes are now looking upon us, as if indeed they looked from heaven; when I recall all your kindness, and all your affection,—I feel,

indeed, that you have a right to dispose of my whole existence."

"I should be glad to do so for your happiness," replied his uncle, in a tone of earnest affection: "I always loved you, but the last few months have drawn us so much together. There is a tie between us nothing can break."

"Nothing, indeed!" replied Norbourne, taking his uncle's hand.

Both were silent for a few minutes, when Lord Norbourne resumed the conversation.

"But you do not ask me how, when, and where?—have you no curiosity to hear where I met with Miss Churchill?"

Norbourne smiled, and his uncle continued.

"Of all places in the world, at Sir Robert Walpole's villa at Chelsea."

His listener looked astonished, and added, in a whisper,—"You call her Miss Churchill; how is it that you know her by that name rather than her present one?"

"Why, Miss Churchill is her present name: but I forget that you know nothing of her history. That singularly foolish old lady, her grandmother, got up a sort of caricature conspiracy, and Miss Churchill was to have been married to a coxcombical Jacobite, of the name of Trevanion; but he was arrested in the church, though he has since escaped by means of the jailer's daughter."

"But what could bring Miss Churchill to London?"

"Why, her grandmother came off at once to see what friends she could find; but a foolish visit to the Duchess of Buckingham, some indiscreet letters, and Mr. Trevanion's escape, made Mrs. Churchill the object of serious suspicion. Lady Marchmont—it is extraordinary how women do learn every thing!—heard that an arrest was intended, and what does she and her fair friend do, but set off, like two errant damsels in a romance, to obtain a pardon from Sir Robert."

"And how did they succeed?" asked Norbourne.

"Why, just as might be expected," replied his uncle, "not at all: Walpole thought them two fools for their pains; and, irritated by the gout, dismissed them with as little ceremony as possible."

"And can nothing be done for the poor old lady?" exclaimed Courtenaye, eagerly.

"And the pretty young one?" returned his lordship, laughing. "Why, I have been a complete Amadis of Gaul this

morning, rescuing distressed beauty, if not from peril, from perplexity. I met Lady Marchmont on the terrace, not a little surprised to meet her ladyship there."

"Lord Marchmont is in the opposition, is he not?" asked his nephew.

"Yes, for the time being; not that he knows very well what he is. We care little for him, his solemn lordship is one of those never long attached to any party, it being quite impossible to come up to their exaggerated ideas of self-importance. They reckon time by a series of personal affronts; for an aptitude to take offence is the constant characteristic of their low, dull vanity—a vanity never satisfied. Still it surprised me to meet Lady Marchmont at Chelsea."

"I never," said Norbourne, "observed any similarity of opinion between the brilliant countess and her lord and master."

"True," returned the other; "but you must have noted, as well as I have done, a careful avoidance of any thing like direct opposition to Lord Marchmont; therefore, I certainly wondered at her appearance."

"But how did she interest you in their favour?" asked his nephew.

"By introducing Miss Churchill," said Lord Norbourne, earnestly. "Norbourne, till I saw that lovely face—so pale, so sad—I never felt how little had her happiness been considered. I cannot tell you how I was touched by her appearance;—what a relief it was to me when I found that I could serve her."

"My dearest uncle," exclaimed Norbourne, "how little are people in general aware of how kind you are!"

"I care for the opinion of people in general," replied his companion, "precisely what it is worth—nothing! Every hour my contempt increases for the herd of mankind. False, flattering, and cowardly,—treating them ill is only giving them their deserts, and they treat you all the better in consequence. Trample them under foot, and then, being in their proper places, they know how to behave."

"It is very discouraging," answered the other, "to find how often kindness is thrown away; but it will not be so in the present instance."

"That is a hint, is it not, to go on with my story?" asked Lord Norbourne, smiling. "Well, I found Sir Robert in a very bad humour: some silly vote, and still sillier speech, of Lord Marchmont had irritated him the night before; and the names

of the very gentlemen to whom Miss Churchill has referred as their securities, enraged him to the last degree. It was owing to their opposition that our member lost his election for the county."

"How unfortunate!" cried Courtenaye.

"'All's well that ends well,'" replied his uncle. "Sir Robert was, at first very much surprised at my taking up the case, and obviously did not know to the influence of which lady he was to attribute it. I believe his opposition, in the first instance, originated in the fear that, by thus acting, I was making a fool of myself."

"An alarm as unnecessary, as the alarms our friends entertain on our account generally are. A friend is never alarmed for us in the right place. But how did you manage to convince Sir Robert that you were in your sober senses?"

"Why, I did what I always do," returned his uncle, "to a man for whom I have respect,—I told him the truth. I frankly avowed that I took an interest in Miss Churchill, and on your account."

Norbourne coloured, from mixed sensations; still hope was the predominant one.

"I believe that the whole business," continued his uncle, "is now settled. I do not think that you will regret Mrs. Churchill being obliged to remain in town for some time to come; and if the fine does dip somewhat deeply into the old lady's hoards, it matters little; for whoever you marry will be unto me as a daughter."

Norbourne could only look at his uncle with grateful affection; and Lord Norbourne continued:—

"I think, Norbourne, that I could do any thing for yourself; yet I shall tell you that my present line of conduct does not arise from my own prompting."

"To whose then?" exclaimed Norbourne, in undisguised astonishment.

"I am," answered Lord Norbourne, "but fulfilling the last wishes of our poor Constance. You do not know even how precious your happiness was to that gentle and loving heart."

"I cannot bear," exclaimed Norbourne, "to think of happiness, and Constance in her grave. Ah, if she did but know the sorrow I have felt for her sake."

"If," returned her father, "according to her own sweet belief, the departed yet watch the beloved on earth, how would

she wish to soothe an unavailing regret! But you must now see a letter I found, addressed to me, after her death."

Lord Norbourne rose from his seat; and, unlocking one of the closets, took from it a small ivory casket. "You open it," said he, in a broken voice, "by touching this spring. Read the letter it contains, and return it to me to-morrow. It is a treasure with which I would not part for any thing in this world."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST LETTER.

Strong as the death it masters, is the hope
That onward looks to immortality:
Let the frame perish, so the soul survive,
Pure, spiritual, and loving. I believe
The grave exalts, not separates, the ties
That hold us in affection to our kind.
I will look down from yonder pitying sky,
Watching and waiting those I loved on earth,
Anxious in heaven, until they too are there.
I will attend your guardian angel's side,
And weep away your faults with holy tears;
Your midnight shall be filled with solemn thought:
And when, at length, death brings you to my love,
Mine the first welcome heard in Paradise.

Norbourne delayed opening the casket till alone in his room; and even then he lingered. There was something exquisitely painful in the memories that crowded upon his mind: a thousand of Constance's daily acts of affection rose before him: never till this moment had he felt them unrequited; but now they were remembered like a reproach. He could not accuse himself of a moment's unkindness, or even coldness; from the hour that they stood at the altar together, her happiness had been the most sacred and the most tender care in life; but now he felt as if he had wronged her in not loving her entirely. The image of another had been in his heart,—might not its shadow have sometimes fallen upon her? Any occupation was better than this mood of morbid dejection; and, suddenly drawing the lamp towards him, he opened the casket. The first things he saw were the long tresses of her fair hair, which her father had cut off after Constance's death. Norbourne's heart smote him,

that he had not thought of them as a sad memorial. His eyes filled with tears, as he took up the glittering lengths. Their pale gold was lovely as ever; but there was something in the touch from which he involuntarily recoiled. It is strange the difference between the hair of the living and the dead: the one so soft, so fragrant, and falling; the other so harsh, so scentless, and so straight. In nothing is the presence of mortality more strongly marked.

There was a perfume hung about the casket; but it came not from that coldly golden hair: it rose from the withered leaves of some flowers, whose scent outlived their colours. Norbourne at once recognised the riband he himself had put round the roses the night of that festival whose end had been so fatal.

"Alas!" exclaimed he, "how tenderly has her father garnered these tokens of the past!" and again he felt as if he ought to have done likewise.

Below these lay the letter. Norbourne could see that it had been often read; and on it were the traces of tears—tears shed by the proud, the reserved Lord Norbourne. He felt that his uncle did, indeed, love him as his own son, or never would he have let him look on these proofs of the tenderest sorrow,—the most gentle affection. He took up the letter: well did he know the delicate and graceful hand-writing; but he saw that the characters were tremulous, and it had obviously been written at different times. How much did it betray of the heart struggling for expression with bodily weakness! At first the page swam before him; but, with a strong effort, he at last read the contents.

LETTER OF CONSTANCE TO HER FATHER.

My dearest Father,—Before you begin the following letter, I entreat your patient kindness if there be aught in its contents to grieve or to displease you. If you could know the relief that it is tó me to write, you would, I know, forgive me.

Before you read this letter, the child whom your affection has made so happy, will be cold in the grave. Read it, my beloved parent, as the expression of my latest wish on earth—the wish that will be next my heart when it ceases to beat. I know that I am dying; and but for your sake, my father, I could be glad to die. You know not how weary I often feel, nor the cold sickness that often comes over me. The day is very long, and the night yet longer. Things that I used to love, now only fatigue me. I gaze into the sunshine, and my eyes close with its

brightness. I look upon my flowers only to ask whether they or I shall be the first to fade. There was a time when I was sad to think of death, when I shuddered at the thought of the dark and cold tomb: but God, in his mercy, allowed not such terror to last. I used to shrink from the grave, where love was not; but I now feel that his love is with us even there. Few are the ties that now bind me to this weary world, and they will be with me in eternity.

My father, it is your old age left childless that is my abiding sorrow. I fear your proud and self-sufficing nature. Who will force you to love when I am gone? You will be unhappy, and your unhappiness will take the seeming of sternness and of sarcasm: and yet, if you would allow it, there is one who would love you almost as much as I have done. Norbourne has for you an affection that but few sons have for their father. He admires, he understands you; and confidence on your part, and return, will make him your affectionate and devoted child. I sometimes hope that it will be so, for my sake. You will grieve together over my loss: and grief subdues and draws those who share it together.

And now, dearest father, for what I long, yet dread to say. Norbourne is young; he will, I believe, I hope, marry again. May she whom he marries be to you as a daughter! Let her be such; you can make any one love you whom you choose. I have long felt that it was your influence over my cousin that made me his wife; for he never loved me. Do not start at this: I was a child when I married—a child in every thing but my passionate love; but I grew to womanhood rapidly. I seem to have lived years, so much have I thought and felt during the last few months. I have learnt the secret of others from my own heart, and that taught me that my cousin had for me only the affection of a brother. How unlike my own feverish, untranquil, and fearful fondness for him! yet how kind he always was! how tender in his even feminine care of me! hour after hour has he turned from all study, all employment, all amusement, to watch and soothe my sick fancies. I could not help being happy in his presence; and yet his absence has often been a relief. I have wept with painful gratitude over the favourite flowers that, every morning, he would allow no one to gather for me but himself. Still there lacked that sympathy which taught me to read his thoughts without a word. Nothing but love can answer to love; no affection, no kindness, no care, can supply its place: it is its own sweet want.

Do you remember my fainting at Marble Villa? A sudden and dreadful jealousy of Lady Marchmont entered my mind. God only can forgive me for all I then thought! for God only can know the agony of my suffering. A moment's frantic misery led to an explanation with Lady Marchmont; and I learned that my wretchedness had been vain. But not with my jealousy of her, who was afterwards my dear and true friend, did the knowledge depart that such jealousy had brought. I could not observe Norbourne's feelings without perceiving how different they were to mine. There was an anxiety about his kindness, which too often appeared as if it had something to make up to its object.

From discovering that he did not love me, it was but a step to finding that he loved another. I have watched him read, first earnestly; then the page has been closed unconsciously, and he remained in a gloomy revery. I have opened the volume when he left the room, and found that the record was of ill-placed affection. Often have I noted how he shrank away from any conversation that turned on those tender, yet deep sentiments on which I could have talked to him for ever: and, alas!—worst of all to bear—I have bent over his feverish and troubled sleep: there was a name breathed amid his dreams, but that name was not mine.

My father, I charge you with the care of his future happiness: think that it is the last, the dearest wish of your child. In the mutual affection between you and my husband, I see the resource of your old age. His ties will become yours, and a new growth of kindly interests and warm affections will spring up under the shadow of the old. If, as I sometimes hope, the departed spirit is permitted to retain in another world those affections which made its heaven on earth, how tenderly will I watch over you!

My beloved father, our parting is but for a season. Not in vain have these divine words been spoken, whose comfort is with me even now. I die in their glorious faith, and in their cheering hope. If I die, as I trust to do, watching the faces that I love to the last, these words shall be my latest gift to you, my father; they will bring their own power.

I am very faint, I can write no more. I commend my dearest husband to you; and that God may bless, and re-unite us all, is the latest prayer of

Your affectionate child,

CONSTANCE.

CHAPTER XIV.

A REQUEST REFUSED.

Age is a dreary thing when left alone:
It needs the sunshine brought by fresher years;
It lives its youth again while seeing youth,
And childhood brings its childhood back again.
But for the lonely and the aged man
Left to the silent hearth, the vacant home
Where no sweet voices sound, no light steps come
Disturbing memory from its heaviness—
Wo for such lot! 'tis life's most desolate!
Age needeth love and youth to cheer the path—
The short dark pathway leading to the tomb.

"Is Lord Marchmont not yet come in?" asked the countess, with a degree of impatience which her husband's return was not commonly in the habit of calling forth.

"No, my lady," replied the servant.

"You will let me know the moment he comes in."

"Yes, my lady;" and he disappeared.

"How I do hate," exclaimed Henrietta, "those mechanical 'yeses' and 'noes!' I wish every body else was as impatient as myself. Though, perhaps," added she, half smiling, "it is as well that they are not."

A few hasty turns up and down the luxurious room, and she resumed her seat, and began again to read the letter, which lay open on a table beside. It was from Sir Jasper; and, for the first time, he asked her to come and see him. The letter was written with cheerful words; but, to the quick eye of affection, there lacked the cheerful spirit.

"It is selfish," wrote her uncle, "to ask you to leave all your gayety, all your triumphs, to share an old man's solitude; but I wish it very much: and my dear child must, indeed, be changed, if it be not a pleasure to gratify that wish. Summer is now in great beauty, but I cannot enjoy our green walks without a companion; and I want you to see how all your favourite flowers have prospered under my care. You must come and be grateful. Ethel Churchill—it was very kind of her to write to me—says, that I shall find you equally altered and improved; so you see, dear Henrietta, I need to re

fresh my memory even of you. Come you must, or, rather, you will; for I have already made all kinds of preparations for your arrival."

"Why," exclaimed Henrietta, "have I left it to him to ask me? why have I not proposed going to him? why have I allowed Lord Marchmont's trivial excuses for delay, to postpone a visit which would have made my uncle so happy? But I will go at once."

Again she began to read her letter, when, suddenly letting it fall, she turned pale. A terrible fear had entered into her mind: the handwriting was certainly more tremulous than usual. He was ill, and would not tell her so. At once her imagination conjured up a thousand shapes of suffering. She saw her uncle—sick, lonely, and pining for his child. She could not bear the picture; and, covering her face with her hands, as if to exclude it, began to weep bitterly.

At this moment Lord Marchmont entered the room in a very bad humour; for one of the servants, sent by Lady Marchmont to seek him, had, by giving his message aloud, that Lady Marchmont requested him to come home immediately, as she wanted to speak to him on a matter of the utmost consequence, placed him under the decent and disagreeable necessity of returning at once, before a bet was decided, whether his own cook, or that of Lord Montagle's, would prepare a single dish to the greatest perfection. The jury of taste had been empannelled, and here was he summoned away ten minutes before the dishes came up. It was a trying circumstance, if not to his philosophy, to his temper.

"What is the matter?" asked he, on entering the drawing-room, and finding Henrietta sobbing; "what can induce you to disfigure yourself so by crying?"

"My uncle is ill, very ill!" exclaimed Henrietta, speaking, however, more from the fears of her excited fancy than from the actual contents of the letter.

"Sir Jasper ill!" replied Lord Marchmont, with the most decorous expression of distress; "I am grieved to hear of it. When did you receive the truly painful intelligence?"

"Oh, may I not go to him at once?" cried Henrietta, alive to nothing but her own alarm.

"I should, of course, however ill-timed and inconvenient to myself, wish you to do what was most proper on the occasion. But you know," continued he, "that you are apt to exaggerate: perhaps you will allow me again to repeat my question

of, When did you receive the information of Sir Jasper's alarming illness?"

"Read his letter," exclaimed the countess, wringing her hands impatiently.

Lord Marchmont deliberately took up the epistle, first smoothing, with great care, a crease that had been made by folding it up in a different form to the original one. Twice, then, he changed its position, till the light fell upon it exactly as he liked; while Lady Marchmont watched him in a perfect fever of anxiety.

"There is nothing relative to indisposition in the first page," said he, after taking time enough, as his wife thought, to have read twenty letters. "But Sir Jasper has a great talent for epistolary correspondence—to be sure he has nothing else to do; but my time is of great importance. Perhaps your ladyship will have the kindness to point out the passage referring to his illness."

"Read the end," said Henrietta, more feverish, and more irritable every moment.

Lord Marchmont slowly turned over the pages, smoothing them as he went along. "I cannot say much for your ladyship's care of Sir Jasper's letters."

"Never mind; only, do read it," interrupted the countess.

Again his lordship began his long and deliberate perusal, while Henrietta watched the slow motion of his eyes with a degree of impetuosity she could scarcely repress.

"Why, surely," cried she, "you are not going to read it again!"

"Indeed, I need to do so; for I cannot find that Sir Jasper makes the slightest allusion to his illness."

"He is too kind, too good!" exclaimed Lady Marchmont: "I know he would not alarm me for the world; but I see it in his unsteady writing."

"Sir Jasper is advanced in life, you could not expect his hand to be as steady as mine," returned her husband very calmly.

"But his anxiety to see me," interrupted Henrietta.

"Is exceedingly natural. There never was any thing so dull as Meredith Place. I shall never forget the few weeks that I spent there."

"It was our honeymoon," thought his beautiful wife to herself; but she said nothing.

"I really must, once for all," added Lord Marchmont, in a

unusually solemn tone, "request that your ladyship will not give way to these whims and caprices. Nothing could be more inconvenient than the way in which you sent for me this morning. You never consider what you interrupt: and, after all, Sir Jasper's illness exists only in your own fancy."

"Well, well," returned Lady Marchmont, whose patience was fairly exhausted, "at least you will allow me to judge for myself. I purpose leaving London to-night."

"Leaving London to-night!" ejaculated her husband—"are you mad? Why, we dine at the prince's to-day."

"What do I care for the prince?" cried Henrietta: "I must and will go to my uncle."

"*Must* and *will*, Lady Marchmont, are words which my own proper sense of my authority cannot permit you to use. I beg to state, definitely, that I cannot permit you to leave London at present. It is very obvious how much his Royal Highness admires you; and court favour is too fleeting not to be made the most of while it lasts."

"But think how anxious my poor uncle is to see me!" said Henrietta, in a most pleading tone.

"It is fortunate that you have a calmer judgment to direct you than your own!" replied Lord Marchmont. "I have an idea—"

"Have you really?" thought Henrietta; "take care of it, for it is your first!"

"Instead of going to see Sir Jasper, let us ask him to come and see us: of course, the invitation ought to be from the master of the house; I shall, therefore, write to him myself."

"My uncle will never leave home," cried Henrietta.

"I am sure," returned Lord Marchmont, "there is nothing so very delightful in Meredith Place, that I remember, to induce its master always to stay there; so let me beg you to compose yourself. No woman who has the least respect for herself should ever cry, it is peculiarly unbecoming; and now I have the honour to wish you a good morning. Have you any commands when I write to your uncle?"

"None!" replied Henrietta; and, as the door closed, she flung herself back among the cushions, exclaiming, "Oh, that I had never married!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRUTH OF PRESENTIMENTS.

I felt my sorrow ere it came,
  As storms are felt on high,
Before a single cloud denote
  Their presence on the sky.

The heart has omens deep and true,
  That ask no aid from words;
Like viewless music from the harp,
  With none to wake its chords.

Strange, subtle, are these mysteries,
  And linked with unknown powers,
Marking mysterious links that bind
  The spirit world to ours.

HENRIETTA wept long and bitterly; in vain did she try to gain some composure by reading and re-reading Sir Jasper's letter. True, there was not even an allusion to illness in any way; parts were even playful in their cheerfulness; still she felt assured that there was something unusual in the earnestly expressed wish to see her. Her uncle had always been so reluctant to urge his claims on her time or attention, so fearful of abridging even her slightest pleasure, that it was no ordinary motive that induced him to urge her visit.

"Alas!" exclaimed she, "what a mistake is our endeavour after happiness! I have all that haunted my childish dreams in our lonely woods; I have wealth, rank, beauty, and wretchedness! I pine for love, and none love me, save one kind old man, and he is far away, suffering solitude I might share, and sickness I could soothe!"

The time had passed quicker than she had thought; and a message from Lord Marchmont, conveying the important intelligence that he was gone to dress, and particularly requesting that her ladyship would be punctual, was the first thing that roused her. She started from her seat.

"Perhaps," thought she, "if I show Marchmont a readiness to oblige him to-day, and make myself very agreeable, to-morrow I may renew the subject of my visit, and persuade him into consenting."

But her heart sank within her when she thought of the cold, chill obstinacy of her husband; even her toilet could not distract her attention. The rich brocade enveloped her graceful figure, and the diamonds glistened in her luxuriant hair, yet they scarcely won a glance from the wearer: but Lady Marchmont had that perfect style of beauty which nothing could disfigure. Mere prettiness needs the becoming, but beauty asks nothing but itself.

The dinner was dull enough; and that worst sort of dulness which frets the spirits, by perpetual demands on their exertion. Lady Marchmont was glad when it was over; and she entered her carriage to return home alone, for Lord Marchmont was going to his club, he had lately taken to whist-playing. As she alighted, there seemed an unusual stir in the hall; servants came forward to meet her, and then started back; she knew without asking that something was the matter, and scarcely could she find voice to ask a question, which her own fears answered. An old domestic came forward; she knew him at once, he had lived for years with her uncle: she clasped her hands, her lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"Madam," said the man, "we have ordered the travelling-carriage; I trust you will yet be in time to see my master."

Lady Marchmont neither shrieked nor fainted, though lip and cheek blanched to the most deadly whiteness.

"In time to see him!" muttered she; and her hollow whisper seemed to reveberate through the hall. "Where is the carriage?" said she hurrying to the door.

"Won't your ladyship change your dress?" asked her favourite maid, who stood ready prepared for the journey.

"No," exclaimed Henrietta, opening the hall door herself, and hurrying down the steps, where the carriage stood waiting: "tell the postilions to drive for life and death!" exclaimed she, springing in without assistance; and, throwing herself back, drew the hood of her mantle over her face.

Her favourite woman followed her in silence; she saw that the advice and directions with which she was generally ready, would not even be heard. Like the other servants, she was awed by her mistress's pale and speechless despair. During the whole of the journey, Henrietta never spoke but twice, and that was to urge the attendants to speed. Now and then a slight shudder passed through her frame; it was when the image of her uncle rose too painfully distinct before her: she dared not ask even herself, should she see him again?

On Lord Marchmont's return, he too, was struck with the unusual appearance of confusion in his hall; but anger was his predominant sensation when he heard that Henrietta had actually set off without waiting one moment.

"She must be mad!" exclaimed he, "to go without consulting me, and without my permission!"

"Her ladyship thought, perhaps, that you would overtake her," said one of the attendants.

"She thought very wrong then," said Lord Marchmont, pettishly: "she may go on her wild-goose chase alone, I am not going half over the country on such a night as this. Why, it rains in torrents!"

The idea that it was more comfortable in the house than out of it, did much towards reconciling his lordship. He felt positively glad that, as his wife had acted without his sanction, she should be subject to all possible inconvenience, as if such could be felt in Henrietta's state of mind.

"Some of Sir Jasper's property," muttered he to himself, on his way to his dressing-room, "is yet unsettled. I do not think that there is any danger of his leaving it away from Henrietta; still, old men are capricious, and, perhaps, it is as well that Henrietta is on the spot: at all events, if she had stayed till to-morrow, I must have accompanied her; now, that will be perfectly needless."

He then allowed his valet to help him on with his dressing-gown; and, leaning back in the large well cushioned chair, looking the very picture of luxurious ease, said, "I shall have a bottle of the old Burgundy, and tell Chloe he must exert himself to send me up some slight *chef-d'œuvre* for supper: I am sure that one needs something, after so much annoyance!"

CHAPTER XVI.

RETURN HOME.

'Tis not my home—he made it home
  With earnest love and care;
How can it be my own dear home,
  And he no longer there?

I asked to meet my father's eyes,
  But they were closed to me;
My father, would that I were laid
  In the dark grave with thee.

Where should I look for constant love,
  To answer unto mine?
Others have many kindred hearts,
  But I had only thine.

The shades of the evening closed round just as Henrietta gave one sad start, and turned her face from the carriage-window, as she first recognised a familiar object: it was a clump of firs that grew on a hill, and were a landmark to the country for miles around. Now, they stood dark and phantom-like, thrown out by the crimson sky behind. Her heart sickened with impatience, the time seemed longer now that they drew so near; gradually, the long shadows mingled together, objects became confused, and it was necessary to light the lamps and flambeaux, and the avant-courier began to sound his horn: it was dangerous to risk meeting another carriage in the then state of the roads. All these preparations wound the anxiety of Lady Marchmont to a pitch of feverish agony: her cheek burnt, her hand trembled; she felt a sensation of choking in the throat; she felt confused, dizzy, and yet with one terror present and paramount over all. The carriage stood; and, for the first time, a scream rose to her lips: she knew that it was at the lodge that they were stopping. It was but a moment, for the gates were open, the porter was not at his lodge, and they drove in.

"Let me out!" exclaimed Henrietta, as the heavy vehicle made its second pause at the hall-door. She sprang from the carriage, and ran into the house; "Where is my uncle?" cried she; but the question was received in dead silence by the as-

sembled servants: the silence was sufficient answer. "He is dead!" said Henrietta, aloud: "I knew it!" and she stood as if rooted to the ground in the middle of the hall.

None who ever saw her ever forgot her to their dying day; her mantle had dropped on the ground, and her long hair, yet partly gathered up with jewels, fell in black masses over her shoulders. From the feverish pain in her temples, she had pushed it back from her forehead, and the whole face was exposed. It was like that of a corpse, with a strange unnatural spot of red burning on either cheek, and the large eyes fixed and glaring, but with no expression. No one had courage to speak to her, and there she stood for some minutes: a slight movement among the servants recalled her to herself; she started, and hurried at once to her uncle's room. A dim light showed the dark velvet bed, with its hearse-like plumes, and one or two spectral figures, that seemed to flit round its obscurity: Henrietta saw but one object, the form extended cold and rigid, and the pale and set face, that would never more look affection upon her. Quietly, almost calmly, she approached; and, standing by the bed-side, gazed steadfastly on the body: at last, clasping her hands passionately together, "Leave me!" exclaimed she, throwing herself on her knees beside the bed. The women obeyed; but, ere the door closed, they heard the long suppressed sobs of the heart's uttermost agony.

Again and again did Henrietta start from her knees; and, dashing the tears from her eyes, gaze on the face of the dead, hoping, almost expecting, that some trace of life would appear, and as often did she dash herself down in fruitless despair: there was that on those cold, white features, none ever mistake.

"If I had but seen him, heard his last words, caught his last look, and told him yet once again how I loved him, I could bear his death; but to know that his latest look rested on others, that he wished to see me and did not, is too much to bear!" and again a violent burst of weeping supplied the place of words.

An hour elapsed, and the attendants returned, but Lady Marchmont again dismissed them: that night she had resolved to watch beside the dead. It is well that the body sometimes sinks beneath the mind; Henrietta could not have borne such intense misery, but she grew faint. For nearly two days she had taken neither food nor rest, and even the relief of tears had been denied to her uncertain and feverish suspense. When the attendants came in the morning, they found her, her long black hair wet with tears, her cheek burning, but asleep beside the corpse. It was the heavy worn out slumber of exhaustion

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST NIGHT WITH THE DEAD.

How awful is the presence of the dead!
The hours rebuked, stand silent at their side;
Passions are hushed before that stern repose;
Two, and two only, sad exceptions share—
Sorrow and love,—and these are paramount.
How deep the sorrow, and how strong the love!
Seeming as utterly unfelt before.
Ah! parting tries their depths. At once arise
Affection's treasures, never dreamed till then.
Death teaches heavy lessons, hard to bear;
And most it teaches us what we have lost,
In losing those who loved us.

HENRIETTA crowded a life's suffering into the next week. There is need of change, even with the dead; and each of the mournful rites preceding interment brought on a frantic outburst of sorrow. The placing the body in the coffin was a dreadful struggle; but when it became needful to screw down the lid, then, indeed, she felt that she had parted with her kind old uncle for ever. No entreaties could prevail on her to leave the room; she sat with her head enveloped in her mantle, her presence only indicated, by a quick convulsive sob, at any pause in that peculiar and jarring sound. She had, on the second day, recognised, and spoken with her usual kindness to the old servants; indeed, it was something of a consolation to gather every possible detail respecting her uncle. The account was soothing, rather than otherwise; he appeared in his usual health and spirits till the attack, which carried him off in two days. He had suffered but little pain; and his last words were a blessing on his beloved child.

"If he had but been spared a few hours," was her constant exclamation: "his last look, his last word —I could lay down my life to have had them!"

Ah! the tender and solemn farewell beside the bed of death is, indeed, a consolation to the survivor! There is nothing so soothing as to know that the last earthly wish has been confided to your fulfilment, the last expressions of earthly affection have been your own. The eyes closing to their last cold sleep, rested upon you, and were glad to rest; and your prayers were the latest music in the weary ear. It is some comfort to

think that you sacrificed even your own sorrow in the beloved presence; and the thousand sad, slight offices, are remembered with such melancholy tenderness. But all this was denied to Henrietta, and hers was a nature to feel their privation most acutely: sensitive and affectionate, she exaggerated their omission with all the bitterness of self-reproach.

At length the day of the funeral came; and, till the coffin was carried to the hearse, Lady Marchmont never felt that she was quite parted from her uncle. She saw him, even as she had last gazed upon him, pale, cold, and awful; but still he was there. The coffin was to her like a shrine; all that she held most dear and most precious was within its dark and silent sanctuary. She sat in the room; she saw them bear it away: with one strong and convulsive effort she rose, for nothing could prevent her following her more than father to the grave.

All parade had been avoided by Sir Jasper's express orders; but the poor of the whole neighbourhood gathered to pay the last respect to the remains of their friend and benefactor. The churchyard was crowded; and yet so deep was the stillness, that not one word was lost of the burial-service. Afterwards, it was a pleasure to Lady Marchmont to think of the affection evinced towards her uncle; but, at the time, the numbers oppressed her: she would have given worlds to have been alone in the churchyard. With an agony too great for endurance, she heard the ropes creak as they lowered the coffin into the ground: and when the gravel rattled on the lid, it struck too upon her heart. To her dying hour she was haunted by the fearful sound; it came upon her ear in the stillness of night, making her start from her restless pillow; and often did she hear it, amid light and music, turning her pale with the image of death even while surrounded by gayety and festival. But when they went to tread down the earth, it seemed to her like sacrilege; and, forgetting every thing in one strong emotion, she sprung forward to prevent it. The effort was too much; and, for the first time, she sunk back in the arms of the servants in strong hysterics!

She was carried home quite exhausted; the only sign she gave of consciousness was, that when they were about to take her to the room which had formerly been her own, she raised her head, and feebly insisted on being taken to her uncle's. Every thing there was peculiarly his, and there she had gazed, for the last time, on his inanimate features; in that room she

could call up his image more distinctly than elsewhere. The presence of the dead was around her, and it was dearer than aught else in the world beside.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE DEAD.

Pale Memory sits lone, brooding o'er the past,
That makes her misery. She looketh round,
And asks the wide world for forgetfulness:
She asks in vain; the shadow of past hours
Close palpable around her; shapes arise—
Shadows, yet seeming real; and sad thoughts,
That make a night of darkness and of dreams.
Her empire is upon the dead and gone;
With that she mocks the present, and shuts out
The future, till the grave, which is her throne,
Has absolute dominion.

Some days elapsed before Lady Marchmont was able to leave her bed; not that she suffered under actual illness, but the passion of sorrow had completely exhausted a frame naturally fragile. But youth, health, and time, are strong to console, and the first bitterness of regret inevitably passes; but from that time Henrietta never recovered her former gayety: a well of grief had opened in her heart; and nothing could stop the under-current of its deep, still waters. One idea was perpetually recurring, "There is no one to love me now!" and, in proportion to the want of affection, the craving for it became stronger. While Sir Jasper lived, there was one human being in whom she could repose unlimited confidence; one to whom, under any circumstances, she could turn for consolation; one to whom even a trifle, concerning herself, was the dearest thing on earth: now, there was no one whom she could truly say loved her. With all her advtantages, with all her fascination and her loveliness, she was flattered, admired, and courted, but not loved. How unsatisfactory was the homage of the eye and the lip only!

It was while dwelling on these topics of sadness and irritation, that her eye fell upon Lord Marchmont's letter of invitation to Sir Jasper. It arrived but a few moments after his

death, and had never been opened; she broke the seal, but had not patience to read it through, its cold commonplace civility fretted her very heart. Impatiently, she tore it into fragments, and flung it in the fire.

" And this is the man," exclaimed she, with a bitter laugh, " to whom I am united for my life; my inferior in every way —mean, shallow, heartless—I despise him too much for hatred !"

But, deep within her secret soul, Lady Marchmont felt she hated her husband; at that moment she would have been thankful to have given up the world, and spent the rest of her life in the gloomy seclusion of Meredith Place. She turned away from the future with a morbid feeling of discouragement: her first brilliant dream of the pleasures of the world had been broken; she had experienced their worthlessness, and their vanity; she felt that they were insufficient to fill up the void in her heart; they had nothing wherewith to satisfy the noblest and the best part of her nature; they contented neither her mind nor her heart. Lassitude and discontent were her predominant sensations: she had only one strong wish—never to see Lord Marchmont again! She shuddered whenever his image came across her; and this dislike was increased by his letters. After a little decent sorrow had been put forth for the late " severe affliction," joined with some weariful truisms about resignation to the will of Providence, the rest of the epistle was filled up with reproofs about her ladyship's extraordinary and improper conduct in setting off without his consent!

Again was the letter flung in the fire, and again absolute loathing towards the writer arose in Henrietta's mind. Days passed on, quiet, languid, and sad. Every day that the weather permitted, Lady Marchmont visited her uncle's grave; it had become the principle object of her existence; and the weather, gloomy, cold, and rainy, though at the beginning of summer, harmonised well with her present frame of mind. She seemed to desire nothing beyond her present mode of life; and yet Henrietta was mistaken in supposing that she had now discovered the existence for which she was really best suited. Her keen feelings, and active fancy, would soon have needed employ: the imaginative temperament, above all others, requires society and excitement, else it prays too much on itself.

The truth was, that she had received a violent shock, and it would be long before either mind or body recovered their ordinary tone: but this mournful calm was soon disturbed by letters

from Lord Marchmont, urging her return. Week after week she delayed it, till at last he formally announced his intention of coming to fetch her himself. Henrietta's grief was renewed in all its passionate violence; leaving her uncle's grave was leaving himself; and yet so subdued was her spirit, by its long indulgence of sorrow, that she could not find in herself even energy enough for resistance. The week that was yet to elapse, she spent in wandering through her uncle's favourite walks in hours of tearful vigil, beside his tomb, and in collecting together every trifle on which he had set a value. Again and again did she repeat her directions that every thing should be left in their old-accustomed places; the grim crocodile itself, that swung from the roof, acquired a value in her eyes.

The last evening arrived, and Henrietta returned from her prolonged visit to her uncle's grave. The misty moonlight that struggled through the black masses of gathering vapours, scarcely sufficed to guide her steps as she passed, languid and lingering, along the narrow path: she had passed through the churchyard the very evening before her former departure for London. How forcibly did the change that had taken place in herself, strike upon her now! Then she was somewhat sad; but it was a sadness soon to be flung aside. The future was before her, brilliant because unknown; she then believed its promises, for she had not proved them, there was so much to which she looked forward: now she looked forward to nothing, for nothing seemed worth having. Alas! the worst part of a heavy sorrow, is the despondency which it leaves behind!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LABORATORY.

'Tis a fair tree, the almond-tree: there Spring
Shows the first promise of her rosy wreath;
Or ere the green leaves venture from the bud,
Those fragile blossoms light the winter bough
With delicate colours, heralding the rose,
Whose own Aurora they might seem to be.
What lurks beneath their faint and lovely red?
What the dark spirit in those fairy flowers?
'Tis death!

THE night was unusually dreary, as, for the last time, Henrietta sat listening to the wind that moaned, in fitful intervals, round the ancient house. There was not another sound; she seemed the only creature alive in the world, so profound was the quiet, and so dreary. The red gleams of the wood fire flickered over the black wainscot in fantastic combinations; the long shadows from the lamp fell dark upon the floor; and the windows whose curtains were still undrawn, looked out upon a sky covered with heavy clouds, from whence the wan and misty moon sometimes emerged, but oftener only indicated her presence by a dim white ring, amid the dusky vapours.

Henrietta kept wandering to and fro like a disturbed spirit; now watching the shelves, covered with dusty volumes, now gazing on the different articles, scattered in the same confusion as when Sir Jasper used his laboratory. On a small table, drawn close to his arm-chair, lay opened a large book, which Henrietta stopped, every now and then, in her troubled walk, to read.

"It may easily be done!" muttered she; and her fine features set with an expression of stern determination. Again she read the passage that had riveted her attention; and, rising from her seat, carried the still open volume, and laid it on a slab by the furnace in the laboratory, it was a celebrated treatise on poisons, written in the fifteenth century. The grate was laid with charcoal, to that she put a light, and then, as if she had forgotten something, hurried to the library, and carefully locked the door. First returning to see that the fire had kindled, she then went to the window, which, with the first gleam of moonlight, she cautiously enclosed, and stepped into the shrubbery. A small, drizzling rain was beginning to fall, but she heeded it not;

and, approaching a tree that stood near, began to gather the green fruit, with which its branches were thickly covered. Any one who had seen her, might have been pardoned for believing, from that hour, in supernatural appearances. Her tall figure was wrapped in a loose white robe, and her long black hair hung down to her waist, already glistening with the raindrops. The moonlight fell directly on her face, whose features seemed rigid as those of a statue, while the paleness was that of a corpse; but the large gleaming eyes, so passionate and so wild, belonged to life—life, racked by that mental agony, life, and human life, only knows.

It was an almond-tree beneath whose boughs she stood. A few weeks since they had been luxuriant with rosy blossoms—fragile and delicate flowers, heralds most unsuited to the bitter fruit. The almond was now just formed in its green shell, and of these Henrietta gathered a quantity, and bore them into the library in the skirt of her dress. She then sat down by the fire, and carefully separated the stone from the pulp, which she burned; and her next task was to extract the kernel, which she did by means of a heavy pestle and the hearth. The kernels were next crushed together, and placed to simmer over the furnace.

From her childhood she had been accustomed to watch, and often to aid, in her uncle's chemical experiments; she was, therefore, not at a loss, as a complete novice in the science would have been. More than once she referred to the huge volume that lay unclasped before her; and, at a certain point, she approached a curiously wrought old cabinet; from one of its recesses she took a glass mask, and some strongly aromatic vinegar. With a steady hand she fixed the mask on her face, and again approached the furnace. The strange-looking chamber, the red glare of the charcoal, her tall form, and long black hair loose, realized the wildest dream of one of the sorceresses of old, bending over herb and drug, to form their potent spells. Once she grew faint; and, springing to the outer room, she hastily undid the mask, and gasped for breath at the open window. She was deadly pale; but the exquisite features were even stern in their expression of unconquerable will.

Again she resumed her fearful task, and hours passed by; and she started as a red glimmer fell on the open page—it was the crimson coming of day break that gleamed through a crevice in the closed shutters. But her task was done! She

snatched up two tiny vials, and poured into each a few drops, like singularly clear water; but in each of these drops was—death! The glass stoppers were inserted; the bottles hermetically sealed; and, depositing them in a secret drawer of a small casket, she locked it, put the little key on a chain that she always wore of her uncle's hair; and, pressing it to her heart, exclaimed, "Now I am mistress of my fate in this world!" Her rapid movement made her long, loose sleeve catch in the glass mask, which fell to the ground, and was shivered in a thousand fragments.

"It matters not," exclaimed she; "I need its services no more!" Hastily she glanced around; and, returning to the laboratory, cleared away all traces of the night's work, and extinguished the charcoal. She then flung open the windows, for the atmosphere was heavy and oppressive; but she started back as the fresh air blew upon her throbbing temples, but brought no colour to her wan lip and cheek. Heavily her eyes closed before the cheerful light, and she turned away with a sick shudder. The closed curtains made the bed-room still dark; and, extinguishing the lamp, she flung herself on the bed. Over-tired and excited, it was long before she slept; sleep came at last, but it was broken and feverish; and the interrupted breath, and the red spot that soon burned on her cheek, told that the dream was one of pain and fear, and that slumber was not rest.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SEASON.

And yet it is a wasted heart:
  It is a wasted mind
That seeks not in the inner world
  Its happiness to find;

For happiness is like the bird
  That broods above its nest,
And finds beneath its folded wings,
  Life's dearest, and its best.

And little space is all that hope
  Or love can ever take;
The wider that the circle spreads,
  The sooner it will break.

Another season had recently commenced its round of gayety; the present was outwardly as glad as if there had been no past; the sunshine played over the onward current of existence; and the bubbles, weeds and flowers, danced on the surface: few cared to look on the rock and the darkness below. Every one appeared to be doing precisely the same things that were doing at that very time the year before. The streets were filled with carriages, the Mall with a very gay crowd; the talk was of *fêtes* and visits; and eyes and diamonds seemed equally bright. The spring had come forth in all its beauty, and the flower was in the grass, and the green leaf on the bough. Change is slow and strange in the social and the natural world; it requires some great convulsion to alter the aspect of either: but, in the hidden and inward world,—there it is that change does its work; we marvel to find how ourselves are altered, while every thing seems to have remained the same around us; but decay always begins at the heart.

Mrs. Churchill being settled in London, Ethel had come out as a beauty and an heiress, and was brilliantly successful in both capacities. Sir Robert had remitted the fine: but flatteries, executed with whatever genius, were quite wasted on the quiet and pensive girl, who

Listened, and forgot them with a smile.

Youth has one delightful time, when hope walks, like an angel, at its side, and all things have their freshness and their charm. There appears so much to enjoy, that the only question is, what to enjoy first? But this period, brief enough with every one, had been unusually brief with Ethel Churchill. It now was like a dream to her that she had ever looked forward. "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof," is above all the motto of disappointment. At first she was reluctant to visit; she shrank, with morbid weakness, from the idea of meeting Mr. Courtenaye; but this she had hitherto escaped, he having been sent on a confidential mission to Paris. She went out, night after night, because it was less exertion to go out, than to refuse the kindness that forced on her the unwelcome amusement. When a day was over, she was glad, and yet there was nothing that she anticipated on the morrow. But Ethel's was a nature essentially unfitted to the cold and glittering life of society; gentle, timid, and dependent, her world was in the affections; those blighted and destroyed, existence was a blank, nothing remained wherewith to fill up the weary void.

The intercourse between her and Lady Marchmont was constant and affectionate, yet there was but little confidence. They were too different: Ethel had not Henrietta's information, nor her talents; and Henrietta scarcely comprehended the want of them. Lady Marchmont was now in the most brilliant hour of her life; her reputation for beauty, wit, and fashion, was firmly established. Her very caprices were pronounced charming; her slightest phrase was called a *bon-mot;* wherever she went, she was followed and flattered; and her whole existence seemed made up of praise and pleasure. With all this, there was that perpetual fever of the heart which broke out sometimes in petulance, sometimes in sarcasm; all admitted that her ladyship was very unequal, but very brilliant; and even her rudeness passed for "pretty Fanny's way."

It is strange what society will endure from its idols. Henrietta had too much vanity not to like the homage that surrounded her; still she was too shrewd not to see through it, and she pined for something better. Between Lord Marchmont and herself the distance became greater every day; she despised him, and he disliked her; ay, *disliked,* for we hate the superiority which we only acknowledge secretly. Henrietta would have loved any man whom she could have admired; admiration is the divinest privilege of a high and generous

nature like hers; it is the smaller and meaner kind who look down, but in her husband there was not one redeeming point:

"The head was vacant, and the heart was cold."

His lovely and neglected wife was in the most painful and the most dangerous situation for a woman. Only her vanity was cultivated; the mind had no employ, and the affections were left to waste.

CHAPTER XXI.

RANELAGH.

I did not wish to see his face,
I knew it could not be;
Though a look had not altered there,
What once it was to me.

Since last we met, a fairy spell
Had been from each removed;
How strange it is that those can change
Who were so much beloved!

It is a bitter thing to know
The heart's enchantment o'er;
But 'tis more bitter still to feel
It can be charmed no more.

"So I hear," said Lady Mary, "that, 'severe in youthful beauty,' you have driven another of your lovers to despair; but it really was too bad to hand over all Lord Portsea's hearts and darts to Mrs. Fane, persuading her that she was the rightful owner of the scented scroll."

"I am sure," replied Lady Marchmont, "that she was delighted to receive it. I hate to have things wasted, and it was utterly wasted on me; but you are wrong as to the hero of the billet; it was placed in my bouquet by Lord Harvey."

"Lord Harvey!" exclaimed the other, with an expression of anger she could not at once disguise. The fact was, that, for some time past, Lady Mary Wortley had considered Lord Harvey as her own especial property. Now, nothing is more provoking to a woman than a lover's infidelity; it is a wrong which leaves her without even the satisfaction of revenge. His very

infidelity shows that she has lost her power; and without power, where is revenge? A sneer is some comfort; and, fate be praised! there is always a good-natured friend to repeat it. "Well," said she, "Lord Harvey is doing his best to find if there be a 'yes' in the world. It would require—what is that rule in arithmetic? ah!—long division, to reckon up the number of refusals he has had this season! However, I suppose,

'Though I miss the sweet possessing,
'Tis a pleasure to adore;
Hope, the wretch's only blessing,
May in time procure me more.'"

"I cannot," returned Lady Marchmont, "answer by your next verse:—

'Constant courtship may obtain her,
When both wit and merit fail;
And the lucky minute gain her,
Fate and fancy will prevail.'

There is to me that insipidity about Lord Harvey, which always belongs to the forced and artificial. He takes as much pains to make up a character as Lady Clevedon does to make up her face!"

Lady Mary turned pettishly away; no woman likes any body but herself to depreciate a lover; it is personally an ill compliment. But Lady Marchmont had little time to speculate on the causes of Lady Mary's petulance; for, at that moment, she felt Miss Churchill's clasp on her arm tighter, while the slight frame she supported trembled with agitation. Her quick eye detected the cause in a moment; Mr. Courtenaye had just entered the room, though he had not as yet perceived them. Indeed, the position in which Ethel stood effectually screened her from observation; and Henrietta thought she could not do better than stand as they were, thus giving her companion time to recover her outward composure.

In the mean time, Mr. Courtenaye had caught sight of the countess, and came eagerly forward to speak. She was delighted to renew the acquaintance; for in her own mind, she had already arranged to what it was to lead. The crowd, which had been collecting for the last hour, had now become exceedingly dense, and a sudden movement forcing Lady Marchmont forward, separated her from her friend. Norbourne did not see her,

face, but saw that a young woman was placed in a very embarrassing situation; offered, or rather drew her arm within his own. She was so situated, that it was impossible to refuse; the crowd still pressed upon them; their eyes met, and to both it seemed like a dream. Neither even attempted speaking; but, though Norbourne felt the arm he held tremble, Ethel was more composed than her once lover. She had pride and indignation to sustain her, while he was divided between embarrassment and an overpowering sensation of delight at meeting again. The face was intentionally averted, but there was the same sweet profile, and the long lash of the downcast eye lay golden on a cheek crimson with emotion. They reached the door before he summoned resolution to speak; but, just as the words rose from his heart to his lip, Ethel, by a sudden effort, caught Lady Marchmont's arm, and whispered, "For God's sake, let us go home!" Henrietta saw her uncontrollable emotion, and instantly complied with her wish: Courtenaye handed them to the carriage.

How long, that night, did the light touch of Ethel's little hand linger in his own! He felt anxious, but happy; he had seen her, and every thing seemed possible; she would, she must, forgive him. But Ethel sought her own room with a bitter and burning heart: she gave way to a burst of passionate tears.

"What!" exclaimed she, "am I still so weak? How I despise myself!"

She rose, and paced the room impatiently; pride, love, and the bitter sense of injury, contending together. Again she resumed her seat; again gave way to weeping, that brought no relief.

"Oh that," cried Ethel, wringing her hands, "I may never, never see him again!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE INFLUENCE OF AN INVITATION.

Life is so little in its vanities,
So mean, and looking to such worthless aim,
Truly the dust, of which we are a part,
Predominates amid mortality.
Great crimes have something of nobility;
Mighty their warning, vast is their remorse:
But these small faults, that make one half of life
Belong to lowest natures, and reduce
To their own wretched level nobler things.

Lady Marchmont was listlessly turning over the praises of her beauty, duly set forth by heroic verse in a poem just dedicated to her, when there came one of those solemn raps at the door, which she well knew announced Lord Marchmont. An expression of disgust passed over her features, and a slight elevation of the shoulders accompanied the answer, "Come in!" His lordship made his appearance; and there was a look as nearly approaching to anxiety as his immoveable face could well convey. He inquired after her ladyship's health with an unusual air of *empressement.*

"But I need not ask," added he, "for I never saw you looking so lovely. Ah! I see that you are yourself the subject of your studies; you must permit me to read your praises to you."

He took up the book, and began to read the commonplace compliments it contained with a solemn and emphatic air, which, if possible, added to their absurdity. Lady Marchmont looked what she was—thoroughly bored; fortunately, her husband soon held that he had played the agreeable quite long enough; and, nothing doubting his success, thought it was the very time to introduce what was the real object of his visit.

"I hear," said he, "that the preparations for the *fête*, Sir Robert Walpole is about to give at Chelsea, are on a scale of unusual magnificence!"

"Are they?" replied Lady Marchmont.

"He intends," continued his lordship, "to give a dinner, a tea-party, a ball, and supper!"

"Does he?" replied Henrietta.

"Why you answer," exclaimed her husband, pettishly, "as if you did not care about the matter?"

"I do not care!" was the answer.

"Now really," returned he, "this is carrying conjugal obedience too far. I can assure you, that I do not expect a pretty woman like yourself to be indifferent to a ball, though it be given by the minister!"

Finding that this compliment was received in silence, he went on:—

"Now, own the truth,—are you not very sorry that my having been in the opposition precludes your going to the most brilliant *fete* of the season?"

"I cannot be sorry," replied she, "for what I do not care the least about!"

"Ah!" turned her husband, "I know candour is not a feminine accomplishment: but what would you say if I told you that you might go?"

"Why, I should say," answered Henrietta, "that I shall not be asked!"

"But you can easily procure an invitation," said Lord Marchmont, who now succeeded in making his wife at least look astonished. "In short," continued he, assuming an air of mystery, "many circumstances have occurred lately that give me a very different view of things to what I had formerly. I believe Sir Robert Walpole to have been a most misrepresented man: I owe him some atonement; my sense of justice dictates it: I mean to go to his *fete!*"

"Do you?" was the brief answer.

"Yes, I feel that I ought; and with me, to feel that I ought to do a thing, is to do it!" added he, looking quite Roman with excess of virtue.

He was obliged, however, to be content with his own applause, for his wife remained silent; and, after a pause of conscious self-satisfaction, he continued:—

"I do not expect you to comprehend my motives."

"I am glad," said Henrietta, quietly, "that you do not expect impossibilities!"

"Oh, no!" said he, with a most imperturbable air, "I always make allowance for feminine weakness; I do not expect your mind to follow mine!"

"Now, the Fates forbid that it should!" thought Henrietta.

"I am aware," Lord Marchmont proceeded to say, "of my own political importance, and I have been wrong in allowing my personal feeling to the prince to bias my conduct; but every day shows more the weakness of Frederick's charac-

ter. I cannot serve him and my country; I shall, therefore, go to Sir Robert's *fete!*"

"A most proper and patriotic resolve!" replied the countess: "I only see one objection—"

"Oh, you find some objection to any thing that I propose!" interrupted her husband: "why should I not go, if I please, to Sir Robert's ball?"

"Only," answered Henrietta, "that you have not an invitation!"

"It will be very easy," persisted his lordship, "to obtain one."

"Not so very easy," replied she: "why, the invitations are as much canvassed for, as a seat in parliament!"

"The greater the difficulty, the greater the triumph in procuring one: that triumph I reserve for you," said her husband, bowing with an excess of conjugal gallantry.

"For me!" cried Henrietta, with unqualified surprise.

"You will readily suppose," replied Lord Marchmont, resuming all his solemnity, "that I never propose a plan, without having duly considered the most eligible method of carrying it into execution. I have designed, it remains for you to execute!"

Henrietta gave a silent bow of inquiry.

"I am aware," continued her husband, "what a favourite you are with Lord Norbourne: I am not jealous, as I know it is on his daughter's account. What a melancholy thing her death was! such a pity she should have died before this *fete!* You can make some little allusion to your friendship for her, and ask Lord Norbourne to procure us tickets."

"I do not like to ask him," said Lady Marchmont.

"Oh, no! of course, you like nothing that I propose!" interrupted his lordship. "I request, however, that you will attend to my commands, not to your own capricious likings and dislikings!"

"I will obey, my lord," replied Henrietta, with a mock-tragedy air.

Lord Marchmont rose from his seat, saying, "I hope you fully understand the importance of your mission. It is no trifle to have my political adhesion to give in: you will be a welcome visiter!"

"I do not doubt it!" said Henrietta.

"You had better complete your toilet, for I have ordered the carriage: I never neglect any thing:" and, with these words, his lordship bowed out of the room.

"I know Lord Norbourne's kindness," said Henrietta, "or

I would have refused, point blank. I wonder what has occasioned this sudden change: but of what use is it hunting for some motive, too small to discover."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ASKING FOR AN INVITATION.

This is a weary and a wretched life,
With nothing to redeem it but the heart.
Affection, earth's great purifier, stirs
Our embers into flame, and that ascends.
All finer natures walk this bitter world
But for a while, then Heaven asks its own,
And we can but remember and regret.

Lady Marchmont's name procured her instant admittance; and Lord Norbourne came down to hand her from the carriage, and take her to his own room.

"I find," said he, "that my curiosity, which was up in arms when your card was brought, is quite lost in the pleasure of seeing you. I shall not allow you to tell me your business for a long time."

"I am in no hurry," said Henrietta, smiling; while her eye, glancing round the room, caught sight of Constance's picture. "How like, how very like!" exclaimed she, approaching it, partly to conceal her emotion.

"It is," said Lord Norbourne, "such a comfort, and such a companion."

"She looks like what she was, an angel!" exclaimed the countess, earnestly. "I never knew any one who did me so much good. I grew better while she was with me. Oh, Lord Norbourne! I felt her loss and yours deeply at the time; but I have felt it more bitterly since. My poor uncle—;" but she could not finish the sentence; and the tears she could not restrain, entirely overpowered her. "I wish," exclaimed she, in broken sobs, "that I had died instead of Constance!"

"My dear child," said Lord Norbourne, "you are too young, and should be too happy, for such a wish."

"I am not happy," she replied; "in losing my uncle, I lost the only human being who really cared for me. You cannot

think how weary I am of the heartless, useless life that I lead. I wish I had been your daughter: I should have had some one to look up to, and to love. Ah, the lot of Constance was far happier than we deem!"

"I believe it was," replied Lord Norbourne, kindly taking his companion's hand. "I have learnt to think of my loss with a sadness that soothes me. I turn to her image when overfretted with worldly cares. I hope almost as she hoped for our re-union."

"I cannot tell you," continued Henrietta, "how often I think of her. Perhaps, from being the only objects of my affections that I ever lost, her idea and that of my uncle are singularly blended together. Ah, we never know how dearly we loved our friends until the grave has closed over them."

Lord Norbourne would fain have said something to comfort her, but even he could think of nothing. All consolations appear commonplace in the presence of a great sorrow. For other griefs there are many pleas to urge for forgetfulness; but to urge upon us the forgetfulness of the dead, seems like profanation of their sad and sacred memory. Lord Norbourne, too, was touched by the confidence reposed in him. He knew Lord Marchmont, and felt how utterly his wife was thrown away upon him; and yet it was a sort of unhappiness to which it was impossible to allude, and still more impossible to redress.

"Yet who would believe," exclaimed he, half-thinking, aloud, "to see you sometimes so brilliant, and, seemingly, so gay, that the envied and flattered Lady Marchmont knew the bitterness of regret, or the darkness of despondency?"

"Ah," replied she, "life is very inconsistent. We contradict each other; still more do we contradict ourselves. It seems to me as if there were a perpetual warfare going on between the outward and the inner world. Nothing is really what it appears to be; and this is what discourages me more than I can express —the not knowing to what I may trust, and my utter inability to discern between that which is, and that which only seems."

"Half the misery in this life," returned Lord Norbourne, "originates in its falsehood. We conceal our thoughts and our feelings, till, even to ourselves, they become confused; and half our time is spent in fretting and feverish attempts to disentangle the webs we have woven: and the strange thing is, that all this dissimulation is unnecessary; we should have done far better without it."

"What a small, worthless thing," exclaimed Henrietta, "is

our existence, filled with mean envyings, paltry hopes! and, if for one instant redeemed by a true affection, or a generous emotion, what wretchedness is sure to follow the indulgence of either!"

"You must not come to me," answered her listener, "for a defence of society; I have long since loathed its bitterness as much as I despise its baseness. You cannot know the miserably mean motives that actuate the generality; but the trifles so sought give their own narrowness to the mind."

"And that brings me at once," interrupted Henrietta, "to the object of my visit; the motives, however, being supposed to lie too deep for my feminine apprehension. Guess what brings me here."

"Nay," replied her companion, "what have I done for you to presuppose such a want of gallantry, as to imagine that I would attempt to guess a lady's secret before she thought proper to communicate it?"

"It is not interesting enough," answered she, "for me to make a mystery of it: but the fact is, that Lord Marchmont has either caught cold by sitting on the opposition benches, or thinks that nothing but his own personal experience can decide whether Sir Robert's cook exceeds his own—a subject on which I have lately heard him express much anxiety. He has suddenly discovered that England owes every thing to the present administration, which he has henceforth resolved to support with both vote and voice.

"We shall be glad of the vote," replied Lord Norbourne, "though we would dispense with the voice."

"I fear me," answered the countess, "that you must take your bargain 'for better or worse.' But I have not yet arrived at my business. There is a condition annexed to the proposed alliance."

"Something very unreasonable, I suppose," cried Lord Norbourne. "Is it a marquisate, or the next vacant riband?"

"Your conjectures are not what yours generally have the reputation of being; but wide, indeed, of the mark. However, if your penetration be at fault, you will at least have the satisfaction of establishing your theory of small motives."

"Well," said he, "let me hear what bribe (I beg pardon for the word) is to win over our potent ally."

"Only," replied Lady Marchmont, "an invitation to Sir Robert's *fête* at Chelsea."

"An invitation!" exclaimed Lord Norbourne,—"he shall

have a dozen if he please. I will take care that the tickets are duly forwarded this afternoon."

"Many thanks for your kindness," said she, rising from her seat. "Ah, Lord Norbourne! you do not know how to grant favours: you have not made me feel awkward or embarrassed in the least. I really do not hate you for having obliged me."

Lord Norbourne laughed, and took her hand to lead her to the carriage.

"By the way," said he, as they were descending the staircase, "how is your beautiful friend, Miss Churchill? and, speaking of so great an ornament to a ball-room, you must allow me to send her a card together with your own."

"You are too kind," exclaimed Henrietta, delighted.

"Oh, no; I am only selfish," returned Lord Norbourne. "I shall expect a vote of thanks from Sir Robert for my beauties."

"I shall do nothing for the next week but study my costume and complexion," said she. "Ethel and myself will consider our conquests as proper compliments to your kindness."

"Ah! as to your charming self," replied he,

"'The world is all before you where to choose;'"

but, do you know I am rather inclined to limit the sphere of Miss Churchill's fascination. It has already, unless I am greatly mistaken, produced due effect on Norbourne; and, of course, I am in his interests."

"Well, I promise you to circumscribe her conquests as much as possible by extending my own," returned Henrietta. "It will be an easy task; for Miss Churchill does not do 'the honours of her eyes.' I often tell her her beauty is quite wasted upon her."

"Not wasted," said her companion, "if it do but procure for her the true allegiance of one affectionate heart; and I know Norbourne too well not to know how safely he may be trusted even with the happiness of another."

"This is as much as to say," thought Lady Marchmont, when seated in the carriage, "Lord Norbourne is quite prepared to give his consent to his nephew's marrying again. Well, I hope that Ethel will recover her bloom and spirits: if there is such a thing as happiness in this wide and weary world, it is before her now. I wish I could anticipate things as eagerly as I used to do; but, alas! scarcely any thing seems worth anticipating; or if some fair hope arise upon the distance, it is too good to be true."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FETE AT SIR ROBERT WALPOLE'S.

Few, save the poor, feel for the poor:
  The rich know not how hard
It is to be of needful food
  And needful rest debarred.

Their paths are paths of plenteousness,
  They sleep on silk and down;
And never think how heavily
  The weary head lies down.

They know not of the scanty meal,
  With small pale faces round;
No fire upon the cold damp hearth
  When snow is on the ground.

They never by the window lean,
  And see the gay pass by;
Then take their weary task again,
  But with a sadder eye.

There is no denying that there are "royal roads" through existence for the upper classes; for them, at least, the highways are macadamised, swept, and watered. They are surrounded not only by luxuries, but by pleasures, which, at all events to the young, must have the zest of novelty. It seems to me the veriest fallacy to say that the lots in life are weighed out in equal balances: the difference is very great—to the examiner, sad: and to the sufferer bitter! Before we talk of equality of pain, which is, in nine cases out of ten, only a selfish and indolent excuse for neglect, let us contrast a high and a low position together. On one side is protection, instruction, and pleasure; on the other is neglect, ignorance and hardship. Here, wants are invented to become luxuries; there, "hunger swallows all in one low want." Among the rich, body and mind are cultivated with equal watchfulness; among the poor, the body is left to disease and to decrepitude, and the mind to void and destruction. I grant that I speak of the two extremes; but it is the worst ill of social existence that there should be such extremes.

The child of the rich man sleeps in the silken cradle, his little cries are hushed by the nurse, whose only duty is to

watch the progress of that tiny frame. The least illness, and the physician bestows on the infant heir the knowledge of a life; for every single patient benefits by all his predecessors. The child becomes a boy: Eton or Westminster, Oxford or Cambridge, have garnered for his sake the wisdom of centuries: he is launched into public life, and there are friends and connexions on either hand, as stepping stones in his way. He arrives at old age: the arm-chair is ready, and the old port has been long in the cellars of his country-house to share its strength with its master. He dies; his very coffin is comfortable; the very vault of his ancestors is sheltered; a funeral sermon is preached in his honour; and escutcheon and marble tablet do their best to preserve his memory.

Take the reverse of the picture. The infancy of the poor child is one of cries, too often of blows; natural affection has given way before the iron pressure of want. The old proverb, that, "When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out at the window," is true in a far more general sense than the one in which it is generally applied. They have the floor for a bed; the scant and mouldering remnant of food for dinner; the cold hearth, where the wind blows in the snows;—these physical sufferings re-act on the moral world, they deaden and embitter the sweetest of our feelings. The parent half loves, half loathes, the child that takes the bread from his own mouth; and the child looks on that as tyranny, which is only misery. It learns to fear before it learns to love.

Suppose such a childhood past: it has escaped disease; no chance chill has distorted the youthful limbs, they have, at least, health to begin life. The poor man has nothing more than his strength. God's best gifts lie dormant within him: the chances are that he cannot read even the holy page, that, at least, holds out the hope of a less miserable world. He has not that mental cultivation which alone teaches us what are our resources, and how to husband or to exert them. He knows only how to labour, and that not in the most serviceable manner to himself. He does not, even when he can, which is rare enough, lay by for the future, because he has never been accustomed to reflect. Life has for him no future. Perhaps he takes to drinking; and it is easy, with half-a-dozen different kinds of French wines on the table, the claret purple beside the golden sherry, to say a thousand true and excellent things on the crime of excess. If the gentleman refrains, it is from a moral restraint the poor man

has never been taught to exercise; and what does the poor man drink to avoid—cold, hunger, perhaps bodily pain—always bodily weariness!

Old age comes on feeble, and often premature, when his place of refuge is a straw pallet, where, if his family keep him, it is an act of Roman virtue, the very devotion of duty and affection; for even the old man's morsel must be taken from their own. But the workhouse is the ordinary resting-place before the grave; and there human selfishness takes its most revolting aspect; there life has not left one illusion, or affection: all is harsh, cold, revolting, and unnatural. The difference that began in the cradle continues to the tomb. The bare coffin, a few boards hastily nailed together, is flung into the earth; the service is hurried over, the ground trodden down, and the next day the children are playing upon the new grave, whose tenant is already forgotten. So much for the equality of human existence.

But the *fête* of to-day belonged to a different order of things. Luxury, aided by refinement, gave every grace to the external world, at least. Villas are, I believe, a delightful invention of the Romans, who set very seriously about enjoying the world they had conquered. Sir Robert's villa would have done honour to Lucullus, who has always appeared to me the most thorough-bred gentleman of antiquity. Alcibiades was a happy union of coxcomb and conqueror; but there was in him a want of that repose, and of that superb self-reliance, which characterises the Roman. The climate and the scenery of England, are admirably adapted to the perfection of a villa. The great charm of our landscapes is their colouring—so quiet, yet so refreshing. The fine old trees, and the fine old tree standing by itself, are peculiar to our fields; the rich sweep of grass so vividly green, the prodigality of garden flowers, and a sky whose intense blue owes the depth of its purple to the white clouds which float above in broken masses,—all these belong to a style of natural beauty which is entirely English. It is connected only with enjoyment; nothing startles as in the vast precipices of Switzerland; nothing brings the past too vividly to mind as in the sad, though lovely ruins of Greece: all is tranquil, and redolent of summer. It is the cultivated, rather than the artificial; just enough of nature for all the purposes of art.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FETE AT SIR ROBERT WALPOLE'S CONTINUED.

Ladye, thy white brow is fair,
Beauty's morning light is there;
And thine eye is like a star,
Dark as those of midnight are:
Round thee satin robe is flung;
Pearls upon thy neck are hung;
Yet thou wearest silk and gem,
As thou hadst forgotten them.
Lovelier is the ray that lies
On thy lip, and in thine eyes.

NOTHING more strongly marks the insufficiency of luxuries than the ease with which people grow accustomed to them; they are rather known by their want than by their presence. The word "*blasé*" has been coined expressly for the use of the upper classes.

Lady Marchmont had acquired much of the lanquid indifference, the most foreign to her temperament, by the want of something really to interest her. She had grown careless to observe, yet even she was quite animated into admiration by the beauty of the garden as she entered. The turf short, but not too short, fresh without being damp, sloped down to the river; sometimes golden green in the sunshine, at others darkly green in the shade. The beds were filled with flowers of every kind, and stands were scattered around of rare and costly plants. Groups of the young and beautiful were mingled among them, and the rich colouring of the period's costume was relieved by the verdant foliage. It was a pretty contrast between nature and art.

"Well," exclaimed Lady Marchmont, breathing the perfume with which a honey-suckle, wound around an old ash, filled the air, "I do confess that I like common flowers better than any. The hot-house plant has no associations."

"And I," interrupted Lord Marchmont, "infinitely prefer exotics: they show that some trouble has been taken on our account. But, talking of trouble, I wish, instead of loitering here, you would come and pay your respects to Sir Robert."

Sir Robert stood to receive his guests on the portico, which gave a pleasant shelter and coolness to the front of the house.

A large hall, filled with odoriferous shrubs, opened behind, and gave a fine view of the river and the opposite bank. Sir Robert was now at the very summit of worldly prosperity. He stood fast in the king's favour: and what, under the rose, was of far more consequence, in the queen's. There was peace abroad, and a ministerial majority in the house at home. In short, the old Scotch secretary, Johnstone, might well put the question to his master, which he had asked that very morning, —"Oh, sir, what have you done to God Almighty, to make him so much your friend?"

Henrietta could not help shivering at the air of solemn submission that Lord Marchmont assumed as he ascended the steps of the terrace. In any body else she would have smiled; but the absurdity of your husband comes too close for laughter, it may reflect a little on yourself—at all events on your taste for choosing him.

"Ah, my fair petitioners," said Sir Robert, with great good humour, as they approached; "I see that you are resolved on being revenged by looking to killing. Lord Marchmont, how do you justify to your conscience having married such universal destruction?" Lord Marchmont began a long speech, of which honour, and conviction, and his country's good, were the only words audible; for a fresh party distracted Sir Robert's attention, and Lord Norbourne came to the rescue, and, offering Lady Marchmont his arm, proposed a walk through the grounds. Now, this was an agreeable arrangement to all. Miss Churchill cared little who her companion was; and Lord Marchmont's small vanity was flattered by being escort to a beauty, who, moreover, was a silent, if not an attentive listener; while his wife, besides preferring any company to that of her husband, really liked Lord Norbourne. The last two, however, had each a little motive of their own. Lord Norbourne wished to stay with the party till his nephew arrived, fully intending then to monopolize Lord Marchmont, and thus to leave Ethel to Courtenaye. Lady Marchmont wished to have a nearer view of a singularly handsome young man, who seemed perfectly lost in the admiration she inspired. His appearance was very distinguished, and yet she did not know him: he must be new to society, to give way to any feeling so open and so naively. The crowd had carried him forcibly with them; and Henrietta found that she had a sudden curiosity to inspect a gum cistus which was blowing at the end of the walk. The result of her inspection was not quite satisfactory, for the stranger had dis-

appeared. But the next crowded walk turned out better: again she beheld those dark and eloquent eyes fixed upon herself, as if unconscious of any thing else in the world. A knot of acquaintances shut him out from sight, and Henrietta had never before thought it so tiresome to listen to news and flattery. Lord Norbourne was the next person detained; but his companion found the delay more agreeable, though, perhaps, to the full as dangerous as delays proverbially are.

"Do not," exclaimed a voice, whose deep melody was remarkable, "ask me about Versailles, every thing was tiresome there, even the love-making; but I remember nothing about it. I can think only of that divine face."

What instinct told Lady Marchmont that the speaker meant her own? Some reply was meant, and the voice continued:

"My whole existence if passed into my eyes; and here I am wasting my time in talking to you, when I might be looking at her."

"The laurel branches were put aside, and the handsome stranger stepped from the shade. His eyes met those of Lady Marchmont, who felt herself colour, and then, angry at having done so, began talking hastily to the first person near. She talked without waiting for an answer, startling the elderly gentleman she addressed by the suddenness of her questions; and then half affronting him by not listening to above one quarter of his reply. But she was the fashion, and the first privilege of fashion is impertinence. Her companion, on second thoughts, only felt flattered by her speaking to him at all. When her party next moved, half unconsciously she looked towards the laurel, but the place was vacant.

CHAPTER XXVI.

> It matters not its history—Love has wings,
> Like lightning, swift, and fatal; and it springs,
> Like a wild flower, where it is least expected;
> Existing, whether cherished or rejected.
>
> A mystery art thou!—thou mighty one!
> We speak thy name in beauty; yet we shun
> To say thou art our guest; for who will own
> His life thy empire, and his heart thy throne?

THERE was an absolute mixture of pique and disappointment as Lady Marchmont passed on; but they had scarcely reached the open lawn before she saw the stranger talking to Lady Mary Wortley Montague, who was smiling her very sweetest, and, worse, looking her very best. An ill-defined dislike, a little like jealousy, arose in Henrietta's mind; a little, however, mitigated by observing that the gentleman instantly caught sight of herself; and that, when not absolutely forced to look at his companion, he looked towards her. Suddenly the two approached, and Lady Mary said, with a forced smile,—

"Will you allow me to present Sir George Evelyn to you?—the most accomplished coquet that ever

> 'Dealt destruction round the land
> On all he judged a foe;'

under which denomination he ranks all women."

"Poets excel in fiction," said Sir George, with a quiet, almost timid, manner, "and Lady Mary is a poet: but, as we never forgive being bored, let me entreat her to talk to Lady Marchmont of some more amusing subject than myself."

"I can assure you," continued Lady Mary, "you meet on equal terms; you cannot be worse than Lady Marchmont;—

> 'Her eyes, like suns, the rash beholders strike,
> But, like the sun, they shine on all alike,'

excepting her husband, of course."

Henrietta looked more vexed than the commonplace sneer needed, and which Sir George did not appear to hear. He was surrounded by some friends, all of whom seemed delighted to see him once more in England. A turn in the walk shut him

out; and Henrietta began to think what a tiresome thing a *fete* is, and to wonder that people ever gave them. She also began to enumerate the number of hours she should have to stay; and to think that it was very unreasonable, even in a prime minister, to give a breakfast, dinner, and tea-party, all in one day, to say nothing of the night itself being trenched upon by a ball. Lord Norbourne's attention, too, was more taken up than it ought to have been with the beauty of the *fete* on his arm; but, alas! he knew every body, and every body knew him: public characters must pay the penalty of greatness.

Henrietta was now all but surrounded by a mob of elderly gentlemen, ribanded and starred; and on the other side was the trunk of a huge cedar-tree. Her prospects might have been more agreeable. However, the very cedar, which, in the first instance, she had ungraciously denominated "odious," improved upon acquaintance.

Not exactly like a hamadryad emerging from the trunk, but stepping very gracefully from behind it, Sir George Kingston made his appearance. "Desperate circumstances," exclaimed he, "justify desperate conduct. Poets lay it down as a rule, that deities are not to extricate a hero from his embarrassment unless there remain no human method of extricating him. Now, nothing short of a divinity can aid me. May I appeal to her aid?"

"At all events," replied Lady Marchmont, "my curiosity is engaged on your side; and if only one half of what is said of women be true, that is quite enough to decide in your favour."

"I take you for my confident at once," replied Sir George; "but, do you know that it will entail upon you, at least, ten minutes' patient listening?"

"I feel equal to the exertion," said Henrietta.

"Will you then allow me to offer you my arm? for, I frankly confess that my disclosure is meant for your ear alone."

Henrietta took his arm, but coloured as she did so; why she coloured, she could not have told herself. They turned into the next walk; and, in spite of both curiosity and confidence, they proceeded, for some distance, in perfect silence. It was very pleasant, however; and not the less so for a little touch of awkwardness. At last, Lady Marchmont arrived at the conclusion that something ought to be said; and, turning to her companion, exclaimed,—

"Let no one ever again talk of feminine impatience; but I,

really can be an angel no longer, so let me have the full benefit of all the ideas I have given you such ample time to collect."

He started as if from a revery. "Lady Marchmont must be so much accustomed to have every thing forgotten when she is by, that she will pardon it quite as matter of habit," was the answer: "but I must not trespass too far on your forbearance. Miss Churchill is very intimate with you, is she not?"

Henrietta felt disappointed, though she could have given as little cause for her disappointment as for her previous blush.

"Miss Churchill is," replied she, "my most intimate friend."

"Perhaps, then," exclaimed Sir George, "you will save me a task to which my courage is not equal. Will you allow me to communicate to you the disagreeable mission which I have incautiously undertaken?"

"What is the matter?—yes; pray, tell me first," interrupted Henrietta, now all anxiety on Ethel's account.

"Miss Churchill is very beautiful?" asked he.

"The loveliest creature on which the sun ever shone!"

Sir George Kingston looked at his companion as if he did not quite agree with her; and, though he only looked his doubt, Henrietta felt the full compliment of the look; again she coloured, and said hastily,—"But do tell me. Ethel is as dear to me as a sister."

"Do not laugh at me," said her companion, in a low, earnest tone, "if I confess I cannot understand inconstancy in love. I told Trevanion I was the worst person in the world that he could employ: from me he must expect no defence of his conduct."

"Mr. Trevanion!" cried Lady Marchmont; "do only tell me that he is married, and I shall be eternally grateful to you."

"It is precisely," replied the other, "the fact of his marriage that I was about to communicate."

"You are the most charming person in the world. You are invested with a perfect halo of delight," exclaimed Henrietta. "Miss Churchill has some chimerical notion of honour in her head, but that is over now; your information does not leave a single obstacle in the way of the most perfect happiness that ever wound up a fairy tale. We must find Miss Churchill, and tell her; but I claim the privilege of being told all about it as we go."

"I may as well use Trevanion's own words," replied Sir George. "'I have no choice,' said he, gazing, despairingly, in the glass: 'one heart I must break. Now that of Miss

Churchill being at a distance, and that of Mademoiselle de Nargis being at my side, the last is most important—I married this morning. Let my lovely Ethel know the fact as gently as possible: lay the blame on Fate, not on my falsehood. Tell her, if she die, her memory will be enshrined in my heart.' "

"That certainly was a consolation," said Lady Marchmont. "The fact is, that the marriage between Mr. Trevanion and Miss Churchill was a family affair, arranged without the slightest regard to the young lady's feelings, which Mr. Trevanion well knew were interested by another."

A sudden turn in the walk brought them face to face with Lord Marchmont and Ethel, to whom the countess whispered a few words in a low voice. A flush of pleasure came over the listener's face.

"Trevanion," exclaimed Sir George, "Might have spared all his anxiety on Miss Churchill's account. She looks as if the news were only too good to be true."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FETE.

Not to the present is our hour confined,
The great and shadowy future is assigned
To be the glorious empire of the mind.

The past was once the future, and it wrought
In the high presence of on-looking thought;
All that we have, was by its efforts brought.

To-day creates to-morrow, and the tree
Of good or ill grows in past hours, what we
Make for the future—certain is to be.

THE superb banquet that had been laid out for the queen was over. For once opinion had been unanimous even about an act of Sir Robert's. The royal party had dined in the greenhouse, the *coup d'œil* of which was as striking as it was new. Vast stands of the most costly exotics reached to the glass roof, which was partly covered by a luxuriant vine, or by a small scarlet creeper. Set in arches of the most beautiful flowers, but with colours that bore comparison even with those of nature, were hung pictures of the old masters. Sir Robert Walpole

was, like Cardinal Mazarin, a great collector of paintings. In both, the love of art was the only glimpse of the ideal, the one single touch of the imaginative.

There was never a nature less allied to the poetical or to the picturesque than Sir Robert's. It never could have entered his head to clothe

> "The palpable and the familiar
> With the golden exhalations from the dawn."

His highest idea of inspiration was that—

> "———— Pegase est un cheval,
> Qui mêne les grands hommes à l'hôpital."

His preceptions were cold, clear, and defined; he never went beyond the actual, though that he took in at a glance. His contempt for mankind grew out of never looking beyond what he saw: now the smallest of human motives are what lie on the surface. It encourages us to be thought a little better than what we are; but Sir Robert's system made no allowances,— it took a low view of the intellectual world, but a still lower of the moral. There was no excitement, no belief, no generous impulse about it. He would have erected no glorious monument to the past, to serve as oracle and incentive to the future. We can imagine his enjoying the pointed and polished satire of Pope; though we can also imagine him saying, "Of what use is it to tell men of their faults, they never mend them?" But how impossible it would be to suppose him entering, for one instant, into the wild and benevolent philosophy of Wordsworth, a philosophy founded on belief in good.

Yet the actual never quite suffices to the mind; and even with the shrewd, the practical Sir Robert, the imagination opened one sunny vista, in which he saw visions and dreamed dreams. To know what passed through his mind, what train of thoughts were conjured up while watching the quiet loveliness of a Claude, or the spiritual beauty of a Raphael, would be a curious study: but the guests he had now assembed were intent on no such curious speculations; they were quite content with the external, without examining into the interior, world.

It would have been difficult to have imagined a scene more like one in fairy land, than the scene as the guests again dispersed through the grounds. The sunset had been magnificent, and the Thames was floating in dark radiance; the waves wearing that transparent clearness, which gives more the idea

of melted beryl, than aught else: every little circle in the water had that trembling light which characterizes precious stones. The atmosphere was unusually clear, as if loath to part with the daylight; but the moon, like a round of lucid snow, had risen on the sky; and a pale, soft gleam, came from the lamps amid the foliage.

One device obtained great admiration: small lights were scattered on the ground, in some of the winding paths of turf; to emulate glow-worms. The principal band was placed in the great hall; which, splendidly lighted up, and hung with blue damask, whose festoons were fastened back with wreaths of flowers, was thrown open for the dancers. But strains of music came from every part of the grounds; and on the river was a boat, filled with wind instruments, whose soft aerial melody floated in at every pause.

The beauty of the evening had little attraction to Lord Marchmont, who was in the card-room, devoting all his energies to the whist-table. Lady Marchmont was wandering about the gardens with Sir George Kingston, and Lord Norbourne had taken charge of Miss Churchill.

Ethel was more than usually depressed; the gayety around made her shrink into herself; she had no sympathy with it; it only made her think, more and more, how the spring of happiness was dead within her: she had no real enjoyment in any thing. The forced gayety which society exacts as its false and weary tribute, only fatigued, without exciting her. She went out, in the vain hope that, leaving behind the solitude of home, she could leave, too, the perpetual presence which there haunted her. Ethel soon found that change of place was not change of thought, and the very effort fretted her with a feverish discontent. It was a constant labour to keep her attention to what was said; however, Lord Norbourne set down her silence to a graceful timidity, and only waited an opportunity to effect a change he had meditated from the first. It soon came; as they were on their way to a transparency of their majesties, not a little larger than life—with Bellona, in a very handsome helmet, on one side, and Peace, with a cornucopia and a full-blown wreath of roses, on the other—the path was interrupted by a little knot of gentlemen.

"How very fortunate!" exclaimed Lord Norbourne. "Townshend, I have been wanting, all day, to say a few words to you! Miss Churchill, can you forgive my want of gallantry,

if I transfer you to the charge of my nephew? Will you allow him to show you the transparency?"

Mr. Courtenaye stepped forward eagerly; and, before she had time to think, Ethel found herself arm-in-arm, and walking on quietly with her former lover.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SCENE BY MOONLIGHT.

Thou canst not restore me
The depth and the truth
Of the love that came o'er me
In earliest youth.

Their gloss is departed,
Their magic is flown;
And sad, and faint-hearted,
I wander alone.

Ethel and Mr. Courtenaye both walked on in silence, both careless of what direction they took, and solitary, even in that glittering crowd, each alive only to the other's presence. At length each stopped, as if moved by a sudden and mutual feeling; perhaps Ethel, unconsciously, obeyed the movement of Norbourne, to whom the quick, silent walk, had become intolerable. On his part, there might, also, have been a little intention; for nothing could be more lonely than the nook where they paused. On one side was a thicket of gum cistus, then in the height of its fragile bloom; a shower of white leaves lay on the turf below, one half had fallen since morning; a willow drooped over the marble balustrade, the long green branches dipping into the stream, and breaking, with their tremulous shadow, the silvery column that the moonlight traced on the water.

Ethel leaned on the balustrade, and gazed down on the river, chiefly to have an excuse for withdrawing her arm from Norbourne's, for she saw nothing of the scene before her. She started, as if from a fiend, at the sense of enjoyment which stole over her at his side; it recalled all her former happiness, but it also recalled how bitterly it had been purchased. The moonlight fell full on her face; and the delicate profile was outlined on the dark clear air like a statue's,—as colourless,—and, Nor-

bourne felt, as cold. For a few minutes he stood, struck less with her perfect beauty, than with the change that had passed over it during the last year. The mouth no longer trembled with sweet half smiles, born of no cause but the very buoyancy of inward gladness; no blushes came, fast thronging to the cheek; blushes without a cause, save delicious consciousness. True, the eyes were downcast, as of old, but they strove not to look up, and when scarce raised, sinking again with sudden shame; now, they were only fixed on the objects below.

Norbourne felt, keenly felt, how much their relative position was altered; even now he could not explain his seeming inconstancy. Could she forgive him? An age of anxious thought passed in those few moments; but there was something that encouraged him in the soothing influences of the calm and lovely hour; despair seemed impossible; and time, so precious, was passing rapidly: the suspense grew intolerable.

"Miss Churchill!" exclaimed he: "dearest Ethel!"

She turned, startled by his sudden address, and the deep flush encouraged him to go on.

"Dearest—sweetest!" continued he, passionately, "tell me that we may yet be happy; that the devotion of my whole life will atone."

"Mr. Courtenaye," returned Ethel, endeavouring to move away, "you will pardon me if I decline listening to protestations, of whose value I am now fully aware!"

"Listen, my more than beloved, my idolized Ethel!" exclaimed he, snatching her hands, and detaining her; "do not rashly throw from you a heart so utterly your own: my only hope of happiness in this world depends upon you: you know not how I love you!"

"This is not the first time that I have heard a similar assertion from Mr. Courtenaye," replied Ethel, with whom indignation was rapidly mastering every other feeling. It was impossible for her to listen to words of love from Norbourne, and not recollect how undoubting had been her early confidence, and how cruelly it had been betrayed.

"Dearest, sweetest Ethel!" cried he, "forgive me; you know not the circumstances in which I was placed!"

To Ethel, this speech bore only one interpretation; she thought it referred to what Lady Marchmont had suggested,—to pecuniary embarrassments: for these she was too young, too ignorant of their effect in the world, to have the slightest sympa-

thy: however, she mastered the bitter anger that gave her momentary and forced composure, while she said,—

"Perhaps I may be permitted to ask what those circumstances were!"

"Impossible!" cried Courtenaye: "dearest Ethel, let me own my forgiveness only to the kind and gentle heart which once I hoped was mine!"

This appeal to the past was most unfortunate for his cause; his allusion to her feelings seemed to Ethel a positive insult.

"Mr. Courtenaye," said she, coldly and haughtily, "might have spared any mention of affection so ill bestowed—of confidence so misplaced. He will allow me to tell him, that whatever my former weakness may have been, not a trace remains of it now!"

"Ethel! my own, my only love!" exclaimed he, in a broken voice, "do not leave me thus; tell me that time may yet soften your too just indignation; give me hope."

"Never!" said she: "nay, Mr. Courtenaye, I insist upon hearing no more: I only marvel at your dreaming I could ever believe you again!"

Even while she spoke, she turned away so rapidly, that she was gone before Norbourne recovered the shock of her last words. He felt that his case was hopeless, and he could not blame her; but the spot was hateful to him; he hurried from the shade, and met his uncle. Lord Norbourne had just seen Miss Churchill alone; and, under the excuse of having missed her own party, join that of Lady Mary Wortley's, just then passing.

"Ah!" said Lady Mary, "I thought that Lady Marchmont was too well amused to take care of you: so come, and I will help you to find her; or, rather, let us look for Sir George Kingston!"

Lord Norbourne had watched them pass, and now he met his nephew, pale and agitated. He asked no questions, but drew his nephew's arm within his own; and, complaining of fatigue, proposed going home.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A LATE BREAKFAST.

Why did I love him? I looked up to him
With earnest admiration, and sweet faith.
I could forgive the miserable hours
His falsehood, and his only, taught my heart;
But I cannot forgive that for his sake.
My faith in good is shaken, and my hopes
Are pale and cold, for they have looked on death.
Why should I love him? he no longer is
That which I loved.

Sir George Kingston had just wrapped her cloak round the graceful figure of Lady Marchmont, and was going to hand her into the carriage, when her attention was asked for a moment by Lord Norbourne. Drawing her within the shadow of a column, he said, in an earnest whisper,—

"Dearest Lady Marchmont, something has gone wrong between Norbourne and Miss Churchill: I suspect that, from most mistaken pique, she has refused him; may I rely on your influence to set it right?"

"You may, at all events," replied she, "rely on my utmost endeavours."

"They cannot fail!" said he: "do justify Norbourne; tell her how wrong I was to strain my influence to the utmost, as I frankly confess I did: but I must not now detain you. Good night. I leave our cause in your hands."

So saying, he resigned her to Sir George Kingston's care, who said, as he placed her in the carriage:—

"Henceforth I shall need a new calendar; the shortest day of the year is, I have just found out, in July!"

Lady Marchmont found her companions in no mood for discourse. Her husband was asleep, and Ethel's languid voice was scarcely audible when she forced a reply to some trifling question; and Henrietta could perceive, from the convulsive movement, and from the short suppressed sob, that she was weeping. When they arrived at home, the light showed Ethel so pale, so worn out, that she thought all attempt at any intercession were best deferred to the morrow. It must, also, be confessed, that she felt too weary for much eloquence as a pleader.

The golden sunshine of noon, as it fell slanting over the windows of Lady Marchmont's dressing-closet the following morning, lighted up as pretty a piece of artificial life, as could ever have furnished painter with an interior. Fantastic figures, and bright birds and flowers on the paper, recalled nothing that had ever been seen before—the fantastic reigned predominant; so it did in the china scattered profusely round. I never could enter into the passion for china; it is an affection born of ostentation. Those stiff shepherdesses; those ill-shaped tea-pots; those monsters, which take every shape but a graceful one; those little round cups make no appeal to my imagination; they suggest nothing but ideas of trade; they are redolent of the auction-room. Moreover, I detest bargains; the bargain can only be one, because either the first purchaser is dead or ruined. He has either left heirs or creditors, each equally greedy, careless, and impatient; or, if these toys be disposed of during a lifetime, such sale only tells a common tale of, first extravagance, then want; fancies indulged thoughtlessly, to end miserably. A bargain is a social evil; one man's loss, tempting another man's cupidity. But, "it were too curious to examine thus," is the motto of daily existence; and, in the meantime, the sunshine fell carelessly over a careless world.

The soft west wind waved the curtains to and fro, letting in golden glimpses, now shedding new lustre over the frosted silver, and polished glass, of the mirror; then, by the change of shadow, giving what seemed almost motion to the quaint figures on the Indian paper, or kindling, with clearer color, the roses that were crowding the flower-stands. The breath of the roses, mingled with the fragrant bohea, which stood just made on the little breakfast-table.

Ensconced, each in a large fauteuil; wrapped in loose white dressing-gowns, the hair only gathered with a single riband, sat the two friends. The excitement of yesterday's triumphs had not yet left Lady Marchmont's lip and eye. She was in the gayest spirits; a mood, the inevitable augury of ill; it is like the very bright sunshine which is sure to precede rain. "When the pavement dries so quickly, we may be sure of another shower," is a common saying, and it may serve as a type. Alas! this careless gaiety seems like tempting Fate.

Ethel was the very reverse: the mouth was pale, the eyes were heavy; during the preceding night they had closed with the weight of tears, but not with sleep; she looked what she felt, very wretched. The habit of endurance, almost mistaken

for composure, had been broken in upon: she had been forced to remember her past happiness; again to shrink from the future. It was as if the gates of life had been twice closed upon her; not that, for a moment, she regretted her refusal; never again could Norbourne Courtenaye be what he had been to her; but never could she feel for another what she had felt for him; so young, and yet with all the sweetest hopes of life a blank: she hoped, she feared, she wished for nothing. It was in vain that she made an effort to talk; her companion's gaiety only oppressed her. Henrietta saw that any attempt to lead the conversation to the point she wished, would be in vain; she was, therefore, obliged to do what, to a woman, is especially disagreeable, to begin upon her subject at once. She hesitated; for her own heart told her, that where the lover fails, no third party ever succeeds.

"My dear Ethel," said she, "tell me the truth; what did Mr. Courtenaye say to you last night? Moonlight and sentiment always go together."

"Don't be witty now," exclaimed Ethel, "I cannot bear it; be serious, and I will not have a reserve from a friend so kind and so true as yourself. Mr. Courtenaye renewed his offer last night———"

"And you accepted him!" replied Henrietta, purposely.

"Accepted him!" returned Ethel: "never!"

CHAPTER XXX.

CONVERSATION AFTER BREAKFAST.

False look, false hope, and falsest love,
All meteors sent to me,
To show how they the heart could move,
And how deceiving be;
They left me darkened, crushed, alone;
My spirit's household gods o'erthrown.

The world itself is changed, and all
That was beloved before,
Is vanished, and beyond recall,
For I can hope no more;
The sear of fire, the dint of steel,
Are easier than such wounds to heal.

"Ethel," said Lady Marchmont, earnestly, "you are wrong: I will not talk to you, because I know it would be in vain, of the advantages of the connexion; for I believe too late, that nothing in marriage can supply the want of affection; but, Ethel, you love him!"

"I did!" replied the other, coldly.

"Nay, you do!" continued the countess. "Forgive me, dearest, if I seem to say more than even our old friendship would warrant; but do let me implore you, not from any mistaken pride—nay," seeing Ethel about to speak, "I will not be interrupted—do not, from mistaken pride, throw your happiness away from you. Think what it is to go through life loving and beloved; to be understood, appreciated, cared for; the thousand slight things of daily life made delicious by a quiet, yet well understood sympathy; your thoughts shared, your sorrows soothed; a motive for every action, for you know that their object is the happiness of another."

"Mr. Courtenaye has already showed how much he cared for that happiness," returned Ethel, bitterly.

"Yet you love him!" said Henrietta. "True, his name passes your lips; if you thought that you were to meet him any where, you would not go; yet, not the less is his image perpetually before you. We drive out together; half the time you do not hear a word that I say; lost in your own thoughts—thoughts which, many slight things betray, are fixed on one object. If

you rouse from your reverie, you are restless and agitated; your eye wanders round in one perpetual search; and if, perchance, as happened once or twice, he has only passed in the distance, your eye brightens, your cheek flushes crimson, and your whole frame quivers with uncontrollable emotion!"

"I did not think," whispered Ethel, "that I could have shown such weakness; you know not how I have struggled with —how I despise it!"

"Nay," replied Henrietta, "why should you struggle with a feeling which, in you, is both natural and excusable? Come, be generous, and forgive Mr. Courtenaye; it is of no use expecting romantic constancy in the present day. You do not know, and, therefore, can make no allowance for embarrassments of a pecuniary nature; but involved estates are very troublesome things."

"Oh, Henrietta!" exclaimed her listener, "what must that love be which worldly circumstances could, in a moment, suffice to change? Ah, what is there in the wide world that I could not have endured for his sake?"

"Well, then," interrupted Lady Marchmont, "endure a little wrong on his part; I have no doubt his uncle exercised great influence over him. Now, Lord Norbourne, who, I can tell you, is one of your greatest admirers, consents, and there is not an obstacle to your happiness."

"Yes," said Ethel, "there is one not to be got over—the past! Henrietta, I could forgive the misery that I have suffered, though even you know not what it has been. My God, forgive me murmurs wrung from me by wretchedness too great to be endured! Night after night, I have laid my head on the pillow, and prayed that I might never raise it again; day after day, I have turned away loathing from the morning light! How could I bear to think on the many miserable hours before me! With what heart-sickness I waited for the letter that never came! I have felt my temper grown irritable, my spirits broken, all my former enjoyments grown distasteful, my very nature changed—all this I could forgive, but I cannot forgive his own unworthiness! He whom I thought so high-minded, so generous; to whom I looked up, and on whom I relied with such fearless confidence; for him to prove so cruel, so false! In what can I ever believe again? It is not for his loss that I grieve, but I grieve over my own wasted affections; for all, that I cannot again even dream! No: let Mr. Courtenaye restore me my belief in his own high excellence, let him give me back my hope,

my confidence, and then let him ask me to love him once more,—but not till then!"

She bowed her face in her hands, and the large tears trickled slowly through.

"Yet," said lady Marchmont, seating herself by Ethel, "this very grief shows you regret him."

"It does!" exclaimed Ethel, suddenly raising her face, and dashing the tears aside. "I loved him—utterly, tenderly, as I shall never love again; but I will not trust my happiness a second time with one who wrecked it so entirely: I have not courage to risk such suffering again. He sacrificed me first for interest; I should next be flung aside for some newer fancy. There is no faith to be placed, where faith has been once broken: and now, let this subject be dropped for ever between us. I will not, I could not, marry Mr. Courtenaye!"

"It is of no use," exclaimed Lady Marchmont, as her companion left the room, "and I know not what to say. She convinces my reason, and yet I see she is wretched; she will neither be happy with him, nor without him. Love is a fearful risk; and, I believe, of all the ingenious inventions for multiplying and varying misery, it is one of the most ingenious."

"One word more," said Ethel, returning for a moment: "I must entreat, as a personal favor, that this subject be never renewed between us. It can only serve to keep alive feelings that I owe it to myself to subdue. Henceforth I shall consider forgetfulness a duty."

Poor Ethel! of all duties, forgetfulness is the hardest to fulfil. The very effort to forget teaches us to remember.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LADY MARCHMONT'S JOURNAL.

'Tis strange to think, if we could fling aside
The mask and mantle many wear from pride,
How much would be, we now so little guess,
Deep in each heart's undreamed, unsought recess!

The careless smile, like a bright banner borne;
The laughlike merriment; the lip of scorn;
And for a cloak, what is there that can be
So difficult to pierce as gaiety.

Too dazzling to be scanned, the gloomy brow
Seems to hide something it would not avow;
But mocking words, light laugh, and ready jest,
These are the bars, the curtains to the breast.

Of all habits, that of writing down your thoughts and feelings, is one of the most difficult to abandon. Henrietta soon found a terrible vacuum left by the letters in which she used to pour forth every feeling and thought to her uncle. Often of an evening, when she came home too feverishly restless for sleep, and yet too indolent for defined occupation, a letter had been a resource; now she took to keeping a journal. Sometimes it was burnt the next day, sometimes kept; but the habit formed itself, and her journal soon grew into a familiar friend. A few extracts will show its spirit.

EXTRACTS FROM LADY MARCHMONT'S JOURNAL.

What an old thing it is, the trouble one takes to collect and to amuse people who are rarely amused, and who do not thank us if they are! What do I recollect of the evening? Little, but that I was rather more bored than usual. I should so like to have talked more to Sir George Kingston. I cannot understand how it is that I, who have lived all my life among strangers, should ever feel shy; and yet I very often do. He had singularly encouraging manners, and talked easily. I think of a thousand answers I might have made, now that it is too late.

It was positively rude to talk to another, as I did, while I danced with him; but I could not help it. "Could not help it"—is not that the reason given for nine out of ten of our actions? He talked to no one but myself: I wish he had spoken to some one else. I should like to hear what he talked about. The other men did not like him; they called him a coxcomb. Peculiarity in dress is never popular with your own sex; if possible, you will be called vulgar: if that be quite out of the question, there is the resource of calling you affected. Ethel thinks him handsome; but she is so taken up with her own thoughts that she has not much attention for any thing else.

Really, being in love appears a pleasant state of existence; it is always agreeable to know that there is another thinking of you, whether you think of them or not. I like the idea of there being one individual leaving your room who will bear away every look you have given, every word you have said,—it gives importance to them in your own eyes; and yet I have often marvelled what people see in each other. Even as a book is read through, people are talked through. One needs change of acquaintance; it is to the mind what change of air is to the body. As Hortense says of the gilded knicknackery of her saloon,—

> "Est-ce utile?
> C'est plus, c'est nécessarie."

I have never yet been able to steer my lovers through the Scylla of presence, or the Charybdis of absence. If I see much of them, I get tired; if I do not see them, I utterly forget them. I hear a great deal of the necessity of loving: I better understand the difficulty of doing it. I wonder whether Sir George Kingston has ever been in love. Does any body ever go through life without feeling it? yet the generality of what are called love affairs appear to me the most insipid things in the world. They put me in mind of the French-woman, who, at a masquerade, was tormented by a full-grown Cupid exclaiming,

"*Mais regardez-moi, je suis l'Amour.*"

"Yes," cried the lady, "*l'amour propre.*"

After all, a story I have heard my grandmother tell of the last but half-a-dozen Lord and Lady Pomfret's courtship, is not so far removed from the ordinary course either.

"Do you love buttered toast?" was the gentleman's question.

"Yes I do," was the lady's reply.

"Buttered on both sides?"

"Oh, dear, yes!"

"Well, then, we will be married."

"How very nice? Yes."

Now half what are called love affairs have no higher ground of sympathy than the poor mutual liking for buttered toast.

There are some people who ought never to dream of commonplacing the ideal with themselves. The world of the heart is essentially ideal: it collects all poetry,—innate and acquired; it is fastidious, dreaming, and delicate; and is a question of taste as well as of feeling; and it is to this world that love belongs. It should be kept as far apart from lower life as that mysterious world of stars and clouds on which I am now gazing. I do like this last hour of the four and twenty that we snatch from sleep. It is so pleasant to feel the excitement of an amusing evening fade away, by degrees, into a mood half thoughtful, half pensive, like the rich colours in the west, melting into the saddened softness of twilight.

What made me say I was bored to-night?—it is an affectation of to-day. It is worse than a sin to be pleased: it is a shame. What has poor, dear Truth done now-a-days, that every body blushes to own her? I ought to be satisfied with the last few hours, if it were only for making me enjoy the stillness; and there is nothing like the stillness of London—it is intense. The very wind has not a voice, and what a depth of purple is in the sky, broken by a few small bright stars! It was a beautiful belief that sought to read the future in their light. We read nothing there now. My spirit denies my words; they yet shine down upon us with influence; they give us dreams, fantasies, and associations: we feel the divinity of our better nature in their presence. If I ever loved, I would almost wish to be forgotten during the hurry of business and the cares of day; but let the beloved think of me in the soft and dark silence of a starry midnight: if he have one spiritual or tender thought in his nature, it will be all love's and mine. Mine! ah, ought I to wish it mine? But I hate the word "ought"—it always implies something dull, cold, and commonplace. The "ought nots" of life are its pleasantest things.

Alas! for Lady Marchmont, when principle became matter of persiflage, and the heart turned away from its own truth.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DECLARATION.

I cannot choose, but marvel at the way,
In which we pass our lives from day to day;
Learning strange lessons in the human heart;
And yet, like shadows, letting them depart.
Is misery so familiar, that we bring
Ourselves to view it as "a usual thing?"
We do too little feel each other's pain;
We do too much relax the social chain
That binds us to each other; slight the care
There is for grief, in which we have no share.

Amid the many contrasts produced by our forced unions of nature and art, there is no contrast so strange as that between the exterior and the internal world of society. It would seem as if the one existed only to give the lie to the other. The one—so dark, so deep, so difficult of access; the other—so covered with glittering falsehoods, and all seeming so smooth and so easy. Only an occasional sarcasm reveals the unquiet of the subdued, but feverish heart. Nothing could be gayer in appearance than the little circle assembled at Lady Harvey's villa. It was a very warm evening; and the moonlight turned the Thames to an unbroken mirror of silver, and gave to the soft shadows of the shrubs, and the creepers that wound among the trellises, an appearance almost Italian. Watteau might have painted the group on the lawn; and, assuredly, Lady Marchmont, Lady Mary Wortley, and Miss Churchill, were each exquisite specimens of different styles of beauty.

"I am not sure," exclaimed Lady Mary, "that I like moonlight; it makes one look so pale."

"Well, if it does," returned Sir George Kingston, glancing at Lady Marchmont, whose regular feature sseemed outlined on the air like those of a statue,—

"'Paleur qui marque une ame tendre
A bien son prix.'"

Lady Mary observed the look, and put her in what is best expressed by an ill-humor. Her liking for Henrietta had long since passed away; jealousy had, as usual, been followed by

envy, whose companion is sure to be dislike. She had not yet forgiven her for Lord Harvey; and now there was Sir George Kingston, whose homage she had quite resolved on making her own.

"*Une ame tendre*," said she; which, being translated into plain English, means 'a tender heart.' "Why, instead of coming from Paris, I shall believe you come from Utopia. There are no hearts in our world."

"For 'ours,' say 'yours,'" replied Sir George.

"No; I mean what I say," interrupted Lady Mary.

"An unusual concurrence," muttered Lord Harvey.

Without attending to the remark, Lady Mary went on.

"We might have had hearts in our cradles; but, as I don't pretend to remember mine, I cannot say. Perhaps at sixteen, too, there is a sort of imagination of one; but it is a phantom which flits at the cockcrowing of reality. We soon learn,

> 'That the worth of any thing
> Is just as much as it will bring,'

and we value a lover by the estimate of others, not by our own. Our own suffrage is nothing."

"This is making love a mere question of vanity," said Henrietta.

"A question, my dear, I should have thought you could have answered as well as any one," returned Lady Mary. "Love is society's Alexander the Great, only intent on making conquests; and we care for no captives but those who follow the track of our triumph in chains."

"I utterly disagree with you," exclaimed Henrietta; "I have always thought mystery the very atmosphere of love!"

"Oh! you would like a cavalier, with the dramatic accompaniments of moonlight and mask. Well, the two first are quite ready, and," added she, with a peculiar sneer, "I dare say Lady Harvey could furnish a mask."

"I think," retorted her ladyship, who cared little what she said, "a muzzle seems more necessary."

"But to resume a subject," said Sir George, "which, whether it be felt or not, is universally interesting. Why, if there be no such thing as love, do we all affect to believe in it?"

"Pray," replied Lady Mary, "don't ask me to account for human inconsistency. Why do people, who would never look at a picture by themselves, pretend to a taste for art?"

"But," interrupted Lady Marchmont, "because some affect

a taste, that is no reason that there should not be many who really have it. I, for one, believe both in love, and the love of art."

"Charming credulity!" exclaimed the other;

"'Catch, ere she change, the Cynthia of the minute!'

but we all know that you are

'Every thing by fits, and nothing long.'"

"It is quite curious to observe," said Lady Harvey, "how accurately you remember all Pope's lines. I do believe that he was your *grande passion;* and that you only gave him up for the sake of appearances, which, I admit, were not in his favor."

This was a disagreeable subject—one woman always knows how to plague another; but it had the desired effect: the conversation languished, and the party began to disperse about the garden.

"How very lovely the river is just now, with its dark ripples growing so silvery wherever the moonlight touches them!" exclaimed Lady Marchmont.

"Lovely, indeed!" said her companion: but she saw that her companion's gaze was fixed upon herself. "Perhaps, from having always stayed so quietly in England," said she, at last, to break a silence, growing every moment more embarrassing,—"I may exaggerate its delight; but I have the greatest wish to see foreign countries. Did you enjoy travelling much?"

"I never," whispered Sir George, "knew what enjoyment was till this moment."

"A very pretty piece of flattery," replied Henrietta, trying to laugh it off; "but not true."

"You feel it to be true," replied he: "I cannot talk to you as I do to other women."

Ah, how subtle is the flattery which at once separates you from the rest of your sex!

"Do you know," continued he, "I sometimes think I fear you?"

"Fear me!" exclaimed Lady Marchmont.

"Yes," returned he, in a low, earnest tone: "or, rather, I should fear you, did I not see how different you are to the gay, the careless triflers around you. Do you think that I could talk to Lady Mary as I talk to you?—she would not understand me."

"Yet, how clever she is!" replied Lady Marchmont.

"And so are you," continued her companion; "but you have what she has not, a heart—a heart full of all high and kindly qualities."

"Oh, pray, go on! it is," said she, smiling, "so pleasant to hear one's own praises."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sir George, "do not, even for a moment, imitate her, in laughing at all that is serious and true."

It was not pleasant to be supposed imitating Lady Mary, so Henrietta was silent; and her companion continued:—

"I said that I feared you—ah, beautiful, beloved, as you are! —and you know it!" exclaimed he, passionately, interrupting the words he saw trembling on her lip. "It is no light thing to know that all control over my own happiness is gone from me for ever; that my very life depends upon your will."

And what did Henrietta say? Nothing; but she listened.

They were soon rejoined by the society; and Lady Marchmont strove to still the reproach, which would make itself heard, by forcing the gayest spirits: affection became suddenly matter of the lightest raillery.

It is said that ridicule is the test of truth: it is never applied, but when we wish to deceive ourselves; when, if we cannot exclude the light, we are fain to draw a curtain before it. The sneer springs out of the wish to deny; and wretched must be the state of that mind which desires to take refuge in doubt! But the instinct of right and wrong is immutable: all other voices may be silenced, but not that in ourselves.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE AUTHOR AND THE AUTRESS.

I cannot count the changes of my heart,
  So often has it turned away from things
Once idols of its being. They depart—
  Hopes, fancies, joys, illusions, as if wings
Sprang suddenly from all old ties, to start;
  Or, if they linger longer, life but brings
Weariness, hollowness, canker, soil, and stain,
Till the heart saith of pleasure, it is pain.

"How beautiful she looked! but how pale!" exclaimed Wal-

ter Maynard, who had seen Miss Churchill, the night before at the theatre; "and she is not married yet! Is it possible that she can know what it is to have the heart feed upon itself?—to dream, but not to hope? Has she found out the bitter mockery of this weary life, whose craving for happiness is only given that it may end in disappointment? But what is this to me? I must be gay—be witty: the points are not yet thrown into the dialogue in the second act. I wish I could remember some of the things I said last night; but, alas! the epigrams uttered over champagne are like the wreaths the Egyptians flung on the Nile, they float away, the gods alone know whither. Nevertheless, I must be very brilliant this morning—brilliant! with this pain in my head, and this weight at my heart," and he drew a sheet of paper towards him.

At first, he wrote slowly and languidly; but what had been a passion was now a power, and he soon obtained mastery over his subject. The light flashed in his eyes, the crimson deepened in his cheek; and, tearing the first page, he now began to write rapidly and earnestly. Strange the contrast between the writer's actual situation, and that which he creates! I have been writing all my life, and even now I do not understand the faculty of composition; but this I do know, that the history of the circumstances under which most books are written would be a frightful picture of human suffering. How often is the pen taken up when the hand is unsteady with recent sickness, and bodily pain is struggled against, and sometimes in vain! How often is the page written hurriedly and anxiously,—the mind fevered the while by the consciousness that it is not doing justice to its powers! and yet a certain quantity of work must be completed, to meet the exigences of that poverty which has no resource. But there is an evil beyond all this. When the iron of some settled sorrow has entered into the soul,—when some actual image is predominant even in the world of imagination, and the thoughts, do what you will, run in one only channel,—composition is then a perpetual struggle, broken by the one recurring cry, "Hast thou found me, oh! mine enemy?" Something or other is for ever bringing up the one idea: it colors every day more and more the creations which were conjured up in the vain hope to escape from it.

"I cannot write to-day," becomes more and more the frequent exclamation. It is, I believe, one of those shadows which deepen on the mind as it approaches to its close. It is a new and a dreadful sensation to the poet when he first finds, that "his

spirits do not come when he does call to them;" or that they will only come in one which makes him cry, "take any shape but that." It is a new sensation to be glad of any little return of power, and a most painful one.

Walter now rejoiced whenever he did a morning's work. Alas! the real was struggling with the ideal. After writing a few pages, he suddenly paused; and, pushing the papers aside, exclaimed, "What a mockery this is! I do not know myself what I write for. Money!—why should I make more than will hold this miserable alliance firm—just keep body and soul together? and sometimes I ask, is it worth even doing that? Fame!—alas! what would I now give to hope, to believe in it, as I used to do! but it is far off and cold: it lies beyond the grave. And love—it is a bitter thing to love in vain!—to feel that none will ever know the deep tenderness, the desire for sympathy, the sweet wealth of thought that is garnered in your heart. How passionately I wish to be beloved again! to pour out my whole soul, were it but for a day, and then die!"

The emotion exhausted him; for Walter had tried a frame, naturally delicate, too severely. The vigil and the revel, the hour of social excitement and that of solitary suffering, were alike doing their work. Bodily weakness mastered for a time the mind. The tears filled his eyes, and he closed them; a few moments more, and he was asleep. He had slept for about half an hour when there came a low rap at the door; this did not disturb him: and the applicant, who had a key that fitted the lock, opened, and came in without farther ceremony. It was Lavinia Fenton, gaily but richly dressed; the world had gone well with her. She took off her mask and laid it on the table, together with a small basket; and, looking around, saw Walter asleep on the sofa. She bent over him for a few minutes with an expression of anxiety and tenderness, which, for the time, quite subdued the expression of her bold, though fine features. Sleep showed the change that a few months had wrought. The soft brown hair was damp, and the dew stood on the white forehead, where the blue veins were azure as a woman's. You saw the pulses beat in the clear temples, and the chest heaved with the quick throbbing of the heart. The cheek was flushed with rich unnatural crimson; but both around the mouth and eyes hung a faint dark shadow, the surest herald of disease. The hand, too, how white and emaciated it was! yet with a feverish pink inside.

The girl leaned over him—vain, coquettish, selfish; the deg-

radation inevitable from her position lowering even more a nature not originally of fine material; yet one spot in her heart was generous, and even pure. She loved him. Had she been beloved again, her whole being would have changed; for his sake she would have done any thing, and could have become any thing. Lavinia was clever; a coarse, shrewd kind of cleverness, quick to perceive its own interest, and unscrupulous in pursuing it. She had no delicacy, no keen feelings that got in her way. She had made great proogress on the stage, was a favorite with the public, and, if not happy, was, at all events, often very well amused. Still her heart clung to Walter; she knew that he loved another, that the connexion between themselves was rather endured than solicited on his part; still she had for him a careful and disinterested tenderness, that half redeemed her faults—at least, it showed that all of good and feminine kindness was not quite extinct within her. She leaned over him, while her eyes filled with tears.

"He is dying," muttered she, in a low whisper; "he has too little of this world in him to last long in it," and she buried her face in her hands.

But it was no part of Lavinia's system to fret long over any thing: she was too selfish, perhaps we should say, too thoughtless, for prolonged sorrow. Life appeared to her too short to be wasted in unavailing regret. It is the creed of many beside our young actress. She rose softly from her knee, flung back the hair that had fallen over her face, dashed aside the tears, and muttered, "It is that he has not been in bed all night." She then began to make preparations for breakfast, took the fruit and cream from her basket; and it was the fragrant smoke of the coffee that roused Walter from his sleep.

It was curious to note the difference between the two whom circumstances had so thrown together; those circumstances, all that was in common to them. Lavinia—shrewd, careless, clever; ready to meet any difficulty, however humiliating, that might occur; utterly without principle; confident in that good fortune, which she scrupled at no means of attaining—was the very type of the real. Walter was the ideal—generous, high-minded, clear in perception; but sensitive, even weak, in action; or, rather, too apt to imagine a world full of lofty aims and noble impulses, and then fancying that was the world in which he had to live.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DIFFERENT VIEWS OF LIFE.

And thus it is with all that made life fair,
Gone with the freshness thas it used to wear.
'Tis sad to mark the ravage that the heart
Makes of itself! how one by one depart
The colors that made hope. We seek, we find;
And find, too, charm has, with the change, declined.
Many things have I loved, that now to me
Are as a marvel how they loved could be;
Yet, on we go, desiring to the last
Illusions vain as any in the past.

"So, all my improvement in your heroine was thrown away upon you. I thought how it would be when I saw Miss Churchill in the stage-box."

It was long since Walter had heard her name, and the sound jarred upon his ear; it brought the real too harshly amid the delusions with which he delighted to surround her image.

"Well," continued Lavinia, "life is just like a comedy, only it does not end so pleasantly; but it has just as many cross purposes. Here I am in love with you, who care only for Miss Churchill; she, again, loves Mr. Courtenaye, and he loves only himself, as far as I can make out."

"Do choose some pleasanter subject," exclaimed Maynard.

"Oh, then I must talk of myself: I cannot think of a pleasanter one," said she. "Do you know that I have made a brilliant conquest:—one that half the fine ladies in London are dying for."

"I congratulate you," replied her companion.

At that moment a slow, heavy step was heard on the stairs. Walter caught the sound before his companion heard it.

"For Heaven's sake!" whispered he, "be silent. There is that eternal dun again. I shall pay him next week, when that cursed pamphlet is done. But the door is closed, so are the windows; if he hears nothing, he will think I am not at home."

The actress put her finger upon her lip; and so susceptible is an imaginative temperament of an outward impression, that, for a moment, Walter forgot every thing but how well the pretty attitude and the arch look would have told on the stage. But a loud single knock at the door recalled him to the full

humiliation of his position. The color rushed to his face, and then left him deadly pale, while he held his breath lest it should betray him. The young actress was at first inclined to laugh; but there was a wretchedness in the expression of Maynard's countenance which subdued even her reckless gaiety; knock after knock sounded heavily upon the door, still heavier did they sink on his spirit who sat crouching and miserable within. A probation of long and shameful years must be gone through; each one with the endurance more bitter, suffering yet more intolerable, before the debtor can arrive at that system of reckless evasion which is the last stage of poverty. Hope and honesty must long have been left behind, one finer feeling must have been crushed after another, and hunger been predominant, before debt can be held as other than the most intolerable shame, the most oppressive misery. Walter was yet young in his career, and he felt it bitterly.

At length, the creditor, tired of knocking to no purpose, and convinced that Maynard was not within, thrust a letter under the door, and his steps were heard slowly descending the oaken staircase. Walter could not breathe even when the echo of the last died into utter silence. He dreaded lest he should return. Lavinia sprang up; even her light feet jarred upon his ear: it seemed as if the least movement must recall the man again.

"Hush!" exclaimed he, in a broken voice.

"Nonsense!" replied the girl; "he won't come again to-day. Why, it is not much," added she, opening the bill; I will pay it for you."

"Give it, me!" exclaimed Walter, angrily, coloring even a deeper red. "I wish you would not open my letters."

"I am so rich to-day," said she, laughing; "and what makes me in a good humour, puts you in a bad one. Come, come be a good child; leave the affair in my hands, and you shall be plagued no more about the matter."

"Lavinia," replied he, taking the bill from her, "there are obligations which it is an affront to offer."

He was right in his refusal. Sooner or later a woman must inevitably despise the man who takes money from her. Before a man can do this, there must be those radical defects of character to which even kindness cannot always be blind. He must be a moral coward, because he exposes her to those annoyances which he has not courage enough to face himself; he must be mean, because he submits to an obligation from the inferior and the weak; and he must be ungrateful, because ingratitude is

the necessary consequence of receiving favors of which we are ashamed. Money is the great breaker-up of love and friendship; and this is, I believe, the reason of the common saying, that "large families get on best in the world," because they can receive from each other assistance without degradation. The affection of family ties has the character on it of childhood in which it was formed; it is free, open, confiding; it has none of the delicacy of friendship, or the romance of sentiment: you know that success ought to be in common, and that you have but one interest.

"You must not look angry," said Walter, whose heart smote him for his petulant refusal. "My difficulties only need a week's hard work; but, I do not know how it is, I am not so industrious as I used to be. A little thing takes off my attention, and I am feverish and restless."

"It is," replied the other, "that you work too much."

"No," returned he, "it is that I do not work enough; that I allow my mind to be fretted and distracted with other things. I am never so well, or in such good spirits, as when I shut myself up, and do nothing but write. I wish I could always keep inventing instead of thinking. But we have forgotten your brilliant conquest. What is the name of your new *adorateur?*"

"Who should it be," replied the actress, with an air of triumph, "but the handsomest and the most fashionable man in London—Sir George Kingston?"

"Sir George Kingston!" cried Walter; "why you say, truly enough, that he has turned the prettiest heads in London! I cannot understand the luck that attends on some, from the very cradle. There are men, who seem only sent into the world to show how much fortune can do for a favorite! And so you are to be

'Orsini's mistress, and his fancy's queen!'"

"You need not look so surprised," exclaimed Lavinia, with a slight air of pique.

"It was at Sir George Kingston's good fortune, then," interrupted Maynard: "I congratulate you on having taken possession of a heart that so many are trying for!"

"I am sure," cried the young actress, "I never said any thing about a heart; I very much doubt whether a man like Sir George Kingston has one. He is excessively vain; and, having lived all his life in society, to society he looks for the gratifica-

tion of his vanity. He has one object in existence—to be talked about; for this he devotes himself to the reigning beauty; for this he rides the finest horses, and gives the best dinners; for this he has furnished his house in Spring Gardens in the most splendid manner; and for this he will take me to be the prettiest piece of furniture, there!"

"I have heard he is very clever," said Walter.

"He is no such thing," replied Lavinia; "but he desires to be thought so. I believe, what first made him talk to me was, that he might say my good things somewhere else. As for liking me, he cares no more for me than I do for these currants!" scattering a bunch over her plate as she spoke; "and yet you will see what influence I shall exercise over him. A man who leads his sort of life, must be subject to *ennui;* he will require to be amused, and I am amusing; it is my business. Moreover, he is vain, and I shall flatter him—the more coarsely the better."

"I begin to believe," muttered her companion, "that what is called delicate flattery, is an absurdity."

"You should lay it on," resumed she, "as we do paint on the stage; it is quantity that tells. But I have, also, another hold on Sir George; I shall do all sorts of absurd and outrageous things, and they will gratify his darling propensity—they will make him talked of!"

"Lavinia!" exclaimed Maynard, suddenly and earnestly, "have you a grain of feeling?"

"It is well for you, Walter, to ask that," answered the girl, her whole face changing, and her words half choked by strong emotion.

"I was wrong," cried he; "to me you have always been kind and enduring: but forgive me, I am not well, and am grown sadly irritable."

"For one word, one look of yours," continued she, "you know well I would give up every thing else in the world. Oh! that you would let me stay beside you, to watch you, to nurse you: but this is folly—" for her quick eye caught the coldness on her companion's face; "I know you do not love me, that you never could love me now. Well, I have chosen my own path; but oh, Walter! there are times when, in the silence of the night, I sit at my window and see the stars shining down so coldly and so sadly, that my thoughts go back upon other years, and a sort of dream comes over me of a far different happiness; I see you, Walter, when but a boy, with your soft, serious eyes,

sitting at the feet of my old grandmother, and reading aloud to her: I have not profited much by those words—" and the girl paused, pale and tearful; but, before Maynard had time to answer, she had started up: "but I shall be too late for rehearsal, and Sir George will be there; he intends giving the gayest suppers after the play; I shall take care that you are asked;" and without waiting for a reply, or bidding further farewell, she left the room so suddenly, that Walter had no time to have prevented her departure, even if he had wished it.

The sound of the door, as it closed after her, sank heavily upon his heart; let her faults be what they might, she was the only human being who cared for him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LADY MARCHMONT'S JOURNAL.

Deep in the heart is an avenging power,
Conscious of right and wrong. There is no shape
Reproach can take, one half so terrible
As when that shape is given by ourselves.
Justice hath needful punishments, and crime
Is a predestined thing to punishment.
Or soon, or late, there will be no escape
From the stern consequence of its own act.
But in ourself is Fate's worst minister:
There is no wretchedness like self-reproach.

He did not call yesterday at the usual hour. How intolerably long the morning seemed; and yet I owed it a new pleasure, it brought my first note from him. I now know his handwriting; it is graceful, almost, as a woman's. I shall not see him till to-morrow. Ah! is it true that I, and I only, shall be present to his thoughts? that life is only life when passed at my side? How intensely I feel the happiness of being loved! I am so grateful for it? Till now I have been so unappreciated, so uncared for; no one, since my dearest uncle's death, has desired to read my thoughts, or to look beyond the surface, and find what deep and passionate affections lay below.

I am the better for being beloved; I desire to be kinder to others; I would fain share my utter content; a deeper pity crosses me when I see sorrow. I was growing selfish, cold,

careless; I am so no longer. I listen patiently, a sweet and ready sympathy seems to knit me closer to my kind. Life had grown so wearisome, I hoped for nothing, cared for nothing; now, a new delight mingles with all things: a look, a word of his, makes my heart beat with tumultuous pleasure.

The other night he came sooner to Lady Townshend's than was expected, and for my sake. I knew he was there before I saw him. How different he is to every body else! Perhaps this is the real mystery of love. I remember reading, long ago, an Eastern story of a dervise, who had a mystic ointment, with which, when the eyes were touched, all the hidden precious things of earth were given to view. The gold and silver shone within the mountain, and the diamonds glistened within the secret mines: so it is with love, who is the fine magician, showing all the veiled treasures of the heart. How much has love taught me, that is true and beautiful! What a mistake to build our hopes on the external vanities of life! circumstance is nothing. How worthless, now appears to me, all that once seemed the chief objects of existence! our happiness lies within. To love, says all that can be said of intense and engrossing delight; even when away from him, the sunshine of his presence lingers behind. He gathered from the old garden-wall a branch of those fragile roses, which, frail as they are, linger on to the last: I have kept them, and those few withered leaves have a charm I never yet found in a flower;

"They breathe
Not of themselves, but thee!"

Strange, too, how all old enjoyments revive: things that I had thought gone by for ever, I read with almost my former eagerness; but I apply all I read to him. Ah! no moment is languid now; I have so much to remember; I retrace all he said, all he did; I imagine a thousand scenes in which we both take part.

Why is it that, in dreaming of an ideal future, I never lay the scene in London? I fancy to myself a lone and lovely island, far away in the southern seas, where never another step entered but our own; such an island as lives in Pope's delicious verse. How happy I could be in Calypso's cave, where

"Cedar and frankincense, an odorous pile,
Flamed on the hearth, and wide perfumed the isle;
Without the grot a various sylvan scene,

Appeared around, and grots of living green;
Poplars and alders ever quivering played,
And nodding cypress formed a fragrant shade,
On whose high branches, waving with the storm,
The birds of broadest wing their mansions form;
The chough, the sea-mew, and loquacious crow,
And scream aloft, and skim the deep below.
Depending vines the shelving caverns screen,
And purple clusters blushing through the green;
Four limpid fountains from the clefts distil,
And every fountain pours a several rill
In mazy windings, wandering down the hill,
Where blooming meads with verdant greens were crowned,
And glowing violets throw odors round."

I did not feel the full charm of these lines when I first read them, but I do now. It is with such scenes as these—lovely, lonely, and distant—that I connect his image, not with the false and glittering passages of our daily intercourse. The feverish and tumultuous capital is only the "*place où l'on se passe le mieux du bonheur.*" Will he always love me as he seems to love me now? Why do I say *seems*? out on such cold suspicion! In the truth of my own heart, I read that of his; and yet there are moments when I doubt even to despair; when the terrible truth of my position forces itself upon the memory, which would fain shut it out for ever.

What right have I to rely on the constancy of another, who am false myself? I tremble at the future: what can I, what dare I, hope for? Oh, that we had met earlier! how happy we might have been! Yet, what do I take from Lord Marchmont, but that which he cares not for,—my dreams, my thoughts, my feelings? Alas, I cannot deceive myself! I am wrong, very wrong; I could not have written to my uncle what I have written here! I can write no longer, it only makes me wretched!

And Henrietta turned away to be more wretched still. She felt what she did not own even to herself—the humiliation, the degradation, of her position. It is love's most dreadful penalty to fear, lest that very love lower you in the eyes of even him who inspires it; and yet this was the inevitable result of such an attachment. But Henrietta's first step in life had been a false one: she had married a man whom she did not love; and she had learned, too late, that in marriage nothing can supply the place of affection.

And she had a yet harder lesson to learn—that nothing can

supply the place of strong, undeviating principle. There is but one wrong, and one right; but, alas! Henrietta was beginning to make those palliations and excuses for her own conduct, which should be reserved rigidly for questions in which we are not personally concerned. We may, we ought, to be merciful to others; to ourselves we should be only just.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A SECRETARYSHIP.

Alas! and must this be the fate
That all too often will await
The gifted hand which shall awake
The poet's lute? and for its sake,
All but its own sweet self resign.
Thou loved lute, to be only thine!
For what is genius, but deep feeling,
Wakening to glorious revealing?
And what is feeling, but to be
Alive to every misery?

"I FEAR," said Mr. Courtenaye, as he entered Walter Maynard's room, "that you must almost have forgotten me; but I have not been well, indeed: to-morrow, I am going down to the country; but I could not leave London without coming to see you, and I have something, I hope agreeable, to say."

Walter received his visiter with obvious pleasure. He had, for some time, been fancying that Mr. Courtenaye neglected him; he was shy, sensitive, and had of late been suffering under those tortures

"The poor alone can know,
The proud alone can feel!"

and at such a time how we exaggerate any slight! and neglect, that, by the gay and prosperous, is not even noticed, appears a grievous wrong to poverty and depression.

Norbourne just glanced round the room; but that single glance took in a whole history of privation and discomfort. The windows were dark with dust; and rain, scarce dried on the seat of one, showed that it had been inadvertently left open. The lamp, on the table, had burnt into the socket: Walter had been writing

all night, and the daylight had stolen on him so gradually, that he had neglected to extinguish the companion of his task. It was now noon, and a cup of half-drank coffee stood beside him; but it was cold, the remains of the evening before. There were no books,—he had parted with the few that he had, but a quantity of papers were scattered about. The slanting sunbeams kindled the thick air; long lines of dusky and tremulous gol[illegible] atoms mocked the gloom which surrounded them; and Norbourne, as he breathed the thick atmosphere, did not wonder that Walter even coughed with difficulty.

"As busy," said he, "and are you as enthusiastic as ever?"

"Ah, no!" exclaimed Walter; "I no longer believe in

'Wonders wrought by single hand!'"

"And yet," replied Norbourne, "all great discoveries have been the result of single endeavor. We owe the Iliad, America, and the Protestant faith to individual effort!"

"The instances you have quoted," replied the other, "are certainly very encouraging! Homer passed a life in blindness and beggary; Columbus in vain solicitation and in feverish disappointment: and Luther's was spent in struggle, imprisonment, and danger. The benefactors of mankind are so at their own expense!"

"This is very different," cried Courtenaye, "from your early creed; then you held the onward-looking hope, and the internal consciousness, to be the noblest incentives, and the best rewards, of high endeavour."

"Then," replied the other, "I believed and hoped; now, alas! there are times when I do neither. I would give worlds to recall my early eagerness of composition, and my reliance on the mind's influence."

"You cannot doubt that influence," interrupted Norbourne: "from our veriest infancy we feed upon the thoughts of the dead; even your own strong and original mind has been cultivated by others. I never enter a library without being grateful to those whose moral existence has formed my own. Our sages, our poets, have left a world behind, formed of all that is good, beautiful, and true in our own. Not a life but owes to them some of its happiest hours; they are our favorites, our old, familiar friends."

"How happy," said Maynard, "would one half the praise and honor lavished on an author after his death have made him

during his lifetime! Let the grave close over the hand that has laboured through feverish midnights,—over the warm heart that beat so painfully; let the ear be closed to that applause which was its sweetest music:—and then how lavish we grow of all that was before so harshly denied! Then the marble is carved with eulogium; then the life is written; and thousands are lavish of pity and sympathy: every thing is given when it is too late to give anything!"

"But you, my dear Walter," interrupted his friend, "are a successful writer;

'Your works are charming, for they sell;'

and you are yourself a welcome guest, flattered!"

"You have used the right word," interrupted the young poet, coloring; "I am flattered, because flattery is a sort of commerce, and I give more than I get. My works sell; but look at the amount of labor, and calculate how poor is the recompense! half that toil, half that talent, given to any other pursuit, would have ensured wealth. Then, as to society, what do I gain by my admission there? First, my spirits, which I need for my own pursuits, are exhausted in the effort to amuse; and, secondly, I have the opportunity of contrasting idleness and luxury with the toil and privation of my own lot."

"Then, dear Walter," said Courtenaye, "why not accept my uncle's offer?"

"Nay," exclaimed the other, "to sell my mind, appears to me only renewing the old bargain with the devil, and selling your soul!"

"I never did, and never shall urge the subject upon you," answered his companion; "but I have another proposal to make to you, which involves no sacrifice of political opinion. Sir George Kingston is in want of a secretary, and caught eagerly at my mention of you. Between ourselves, I suspect the office will be a sinecure; but Sir George affects literature, and will prove a most liberal patron, were it only for the air of the thing."

"And you have been thinking of me, and planning for my benefit; while, shall I confess, that I have been reproaching you in my secret heart with having forgotten me!" exclaimed Walter, to whose impetuous feelings confession was a relief.

"If you knew," resumed the other, "how my last few weeks have been spent, you would not blame, but pity me. My dear

Walter, there is a wretchedness that shuns even its nearest friend: but let us talk of yourself. I have made your going to Sir George a sufficient favor, and taken upon myself all the needful arrangements. Your salary is high; you are to have apartments in the house; and to be the autocrat of the library, where I shrewdly suspect your reign will be undisturbed."

"How kind you are!" whispered his listener.

"And now, will you dress?" said Courtenaye; "for I have promised to take you to breakfast with Sir George. He is impatient to secure you, and we are to be in Spring Gardens by two o'clock. He will expect us; for I am, what he calls, 'disgracefully punctual!'"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

INTRODUCTION.

In the ancestral presence of the dead
Sits a lone power; a veil upon the head,
Stern with the terror of an unseen dread.

It sitteth cold, immutable, and still,
Girt with eternal consciousness of ill,
And strong and silent as its own dark will.

We are the victims of its iron rule,
The warm and beating human heart its tool,
And man immortal, god-like, but its fool.

The church clock struck two, an example followed, during the next quarter of an hour, by half a dozen timepieces, as Courtenaye and his companion entered the room where Sir George Kingston, half dressed, half lounged, the morning away. The walls were hung with damask, of a rich Indian red; he used to contend, that pale colors were a mistake in a sombre atmosphere like that of England.

"Very well to subdue the glowing noon of Italy with your cold sea-green, but here we need a little interior crimson, to remind us that there is such a thing as warmth in the world."

Several pictures, all representing human and beautiful life, hung round: and china and toys, that a lady might have envied, were scattered about. The windows looked over the park, and

were filled with exotics; while panes of colored glass threw rainbow gleams of coloured light over the alabaster vases, and one or two exquisite statues. The breakfast-table was drawn to the open casement; and, in the large arm-chair beside, was Lavinia, dressed fancifully, somewhat over richly for the morning, but looking both picturesque and handsome. Sir George was thrown, at full length, on the sofa; a small table, covered with books, drawn close towards him; among which, the plays, poems, and pamphlets of Maynard were conspicuous.

"Punctual to the moment!" exclaimed he: "what a bad heart, Courtenaye, you must have! I can understand no other motive for a man's being punctual, but a desire of putting all the rest of the world to shame."

"I had no such magnificent motive," replied Norbourne, smiling; "my only one was to introduce Mr. Maynard to you."

"I can forgive punctuality in such a cause," said Sir George, with his most courteous manner; "but I rather feel," glancing at the table, "as if I were renewing my acquaintance with an old friend, than making a new one."

Walter could not but feel gratified by such a reception.

"I need not," continued his host, "present you to the Lavinia, she being your own especial creation. Pray, did you make your 'Coquette' for her?"

"Say, rather," interrupted the actress, "that I made it for him. But that reminds me that our parts are to be cast in the new opera to-day: mine is to be all sweetness and simplicity!"

"Nay," said Mr. Courtenaye, "do not leave us so soon!"

"I cannot afford," said she, laughing, "to lose a single air or grace on your account. What is the homage of three cavaliers, compared with that of half the town?" and, rising from her seat, she left the room, humming one of those delicious airs, which afterwards made the *Beggars' Opera* so popular.

"That last speech," exclaimed Sir George,

'Might serve as motto to all womankind;'

it is the much and the many for which they care!"

"I am amazed," interrupted Norbourne, "to hear you say so; you, who have so many devoted to you, and you only!"

"That is the very reason they are devoted; if I had only myself to offer, who would care for that? but when the triumph is over half a dozen rivals, even my unworthy self becomes an object of consideration! It is not," continued Kingston, "that

they wish so much to have me themselves, as to take me away from others!"

"Do you never," asked Walter, "fear the fate of Orpheus?"

"Oh! that," replied Sir George, languidly, "was merely an allegory of my actual existence. I, literally, am torn to pieces; I shall be obliged to marry some day, by way of protection!

'Ay, there are moments when my thoughts disclose
A dreadful moment, dark with future woes!"

at present, however, I have no intention of allowing any woman to carry so selfish a design into execution!"

"'Bold were her deed who sought in chains to bind
The great destroyer of half womankind!'"

replied Courtenaye.

"Really we ought not to broach such melancholy subjects," exclaimed Sir George, "my spirits are not equal to them of a morning. Here, La Fleu! bring some champagne, and do let us talk of something less alarming! Have you read Pope's last three books of the 'Odyssey?'"

"Yes," answered Maynard, to whom the question was addressed; "Pope reverses the former system of writing: the ancients traced their characters in wax, but his are transcribed in honey!"

"What diverts me the most," continued Sir George, "is, Ulysses being always called 'the much enduring man.' After all his ten years of wandering are past, pleasantly enough, the greater portion of them being spent with Circe and Calypso--to be sure, it was rather tiresome staying so long with the last—how he must have enjoyed his flirtation with the Phœnician princess!"

"Certainly, this is a new view to take of Ulysses!" replied Courtenaye.

"The truth is always a novelty," returned Kingston; "but I have always considered the patient Ulysses, the model of a classical coquette: you may get many useful hints from his career."

"I shall go home at once," said Norbourne, rising, "and begin to study the 'Odyssey' on new principles!"

"The blue-eyed goddess forbid that I should interfere with any such laudable intention! but you must return to dinner," said Sir George, "and then Mr. Maynard and I will tell you

how we like each other; not but what I have quite made up my mind on the subject."

The next hour was devoted to making a favorable impression on his secretary during their *tête-a-tête,* and in this he completely succeeded. Walter could scarcely help being pleased with the graceful flattery of his host, which, to him, seemed to be so wholly without motive; but, to be popular, was Sir George's passion; moreover, he fully intended to use Maynard's talents to the utmost, and he knew enough of human nature to know, that when we serve those we like, the service is well performed. He showed the stranger to his rooms, attended to several minute arrangements for his comfort, and ended by showing him into the library, where every luxury of literature was lavished.

"And now," said he, balancing himself on one of the tables, "as I intend we are to be friends, I must tell you my faults: or, rather, my fault. Do you remember what some one wrote over the grave of Madame la Duchesse d'Orleans! '*Ci-gît l'oisiveté,*' idleness being the mother of all the vices, these said vices being all very accurately represented by her daughters. I do not know whether idleness has been quite so productive with me, but I know that it is my besetting sin; I hate being obliged to do any thing; I want you to do every thing that I ought; to write for me, think for me, feel for me?"

"I perceive," exclaimed Maynard, laughing, "that mine is not to be a sinecure office!"

"Oh," returned the other, "you may always leave, at least, half undone of whatever I ask you to do; I only make an exception in favor of my love-letters, there you may do a little more: in those sort of affairs, it is always safe to exaggerate!"

"You do not mean to say," exclaimed the secretary, looking the surprise he felt, "that I am to write your love-letters!,'

"Indeed I do!" answered Sir George; "you will find it a great deal more amusing, than if I wanted you to write either pamphlets or speeches. The fact is, that I am too good an actor, to succeed as an author. I do assure you, that when *en scene,* I am often surprised at my own readiness of resource, but I need stimulus. I cannot sit down by myself, and fill four sides of paper, which said time might be so much more amusingly employed; no, life is not long enough to write letters."

"But how," cried Walter, "can I possibly know what to say?"

"You must invent!" replied the other: "fancy that you are in love with the lady yourself!"

"But what I might like to say, may or may not suit the circumstances."

"Oh," said Sir George, "I shall give you the outline, but the filling up must rest with yourself. There, sit down in that arm-chair; love-letters should always be written in a comfortable position."

Walter obeyed; and drawing towards him the mother-of-pearl inkstand, prepared to begin.

"I have only three affairs," continued Kingston, "on my hands at present, of sufficient importance to warrant my committing pen, ink, and paper, which always appears to me an expedient to be reserved for the last extremity of *une grande passion*. To one only of these do I propose drawing your attention this morning."

He opened an embroidered portfolio; and, from its perfumed depths, took out a letter, which he began to read aloud. Involuntarily, Walter became interested; there was an earnest sadness, and a poetry about it, which spoke no common writer.

"You see," said Sir George, throwing it down on the table for Walter to see if he liked it, though it never even entered into Maynard's head to look at it, "there is scope for your genius. She is romantic—clever—needs excitement; and, therefore, flavors her affection with a handsome seasoning of remorse. I shall expect a master-piece from you to-night; till then adieu, and pray feel as much at home with me, as I do with you. By the by," added he, turning back from the door, "be sure you fill the paper; women judge of the strength of your attachment by the length of your letters.

Walter drew the papers towards him; at first he hesitated, but the pride of art gradually arose. The letter soon became mere matter of composition; it was written, the writer fully satisfied with his own impassioned eloquence, and then put aside for Sir George's approval. This completed, Walter leant back in his chair, and gave way to a pleasant wonder at the change in his own situation. In the morning he had scarcely known which way to turn;—poor, harassed, overworked. Now, he had a luxurious home, a certain salary, and might work little or much, as he pleased.

"What a folly," exclaimed he, "are our own exertions; every thing depends upon a lucky chance in this world!"

Walter was wrong; but I own I tremble at the fatality which sometimes seems to hang over our slightest actions. How often do we find ourselves involved in sudden misery and unhappiness,

by circumstances over which we have no control! and we ask bitterly, "What have I done to deserve this?" Not in this world will be the answer!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

RETURN TO COURTENAYE HALL.

Ah! never another dream can be
  Like that early dream of ours,
When Hope, like a child, lay down to sleep
  Amid the folded flowers.

But Hope has wakened since, and wept
  Itself, like a rainbow, away;
And the flowers have faded, and fallen around,
  We have none for a wreath to-day.

Now, Truth has taken the place of hope,
  And our hearts are like winter hours;
Little has after life been worth
  That early dream of ours.

Change is the universal prescription for a wounded spirit. "It will do you so much good," is the constant remark. Perhaps it may; but how reluctant is any one who is suffering mentally, to try it! There is an irritation about secret and subdued sorrow, which peculiarly unfits you for exertion; you are discontented with all that is around you, and yet you shrink from alteration; it is too much trouble; you do not feel in yourself even energy enough for the ordinary demands of life.

This was the case of Norbourne Courtenaye. The morning after her conversation with Miss Churchill, Lady Marchmont had written a note, stating its result, to Lord Norbourne, who had placed the note in his nephew's hands. Norbourne, for his uncle's sake, made a strong effort to appear indifferent; and, by a tacit consent, the plan was never made a subject of discourse between them again. But he suffered keenly and deeply; the more so, because it was no longer a duty to subdue his regrets. He had, and did, love Ethel, wholly and fondly; he felt that he could never love another, and he shrunk from the solitude of his own heart.

It had been, for some time, necessary for him to visit the

Hall, and yet he had delayed his going. He shrunk from all that it would recall; he shrunk from change, because he felt that monotony was a resource. On his arrival, his mother was startled to see how ill he looked; but people who reside entirely in the country, are apt to lay a great deal to London, of which that poor, dear, ill-used city, is completely innocent. She never doubted that a little fresh country air would quite restore him; and when she saw him, as usual, pass the great part of every day out of doors, she was, for the time, quite satisfied.

Time was to work wonders; and, at least, it accustomed her to the change that had at first appeared so startling in his appearance. But could she have seen the listless manner in which he wandered through the woods, the carelessness with which he would fling himself on the damp grass, her natural anxiety would have been alive even to agony. I believe that one great reason why the suffering of the mind is so often followed by suffering of the body is, that we are so indifferent about it, that we do not care to take even those ordinary precautions which are taken almost unconsciously in general. There is nothing in life worth attention, not even ourselves.

One evening, lost in one of those melancholy reveries which had become his chief occupation, Norbourne lingered too late on the banks of his favorite lake. The twilight had been one of unusual beauty; the rich crimson, which had kindled the waters with transitory radiance, died gradually into faint violet, and the whispering of the leaves had sank into a deep silence, unbroken even by the distant sheep-bell, which had been one of the latest sounds. It was the dark quarter of the moon; but the stars came out, one after another, upon the cloudless heaven; those stars, sad and soft, which have so much fanciful, and so little real, sympathy with earth: not in their pure, calm light, can the destinies of life be written. Never had Norbourne felt more lonely; there were a thousand thoughts and fancies gushing at his heart, which he longed to share, but which must now remain for ever unshared. He looked back to his hurried and feverish life in London, and felt how much happier was the one that he had formerly planned to himself. With Ethel for his companion, he would have desired no happiness beyond his own hearth, no sphere of utility beyond his native hills.

The evening wore away, and the long grass was silvery with dew; the consequence was what might have been expected,—next day he was laid up with a violent cold; and the fever soon ran so high, that delirium came on; and before three days were past, his life hung upon a thread.

Mrs. Courtenaye hung over him in silent despair; and despair increased by all that escaped from his lips during the delirium of fever. Till the present moment, Mrs. Courtenaye had believed that her son's attachment had been merely a boyish passion; eager and romantic at the time, but leaving no after-trace on the character. The delicate silence that he had observed on the subject, tended to confirm this impression; but now that the heart was on the lips, uncurbed, and unconscious, the secret of that heart became her own. He spoke of Ethel continually; entreated her to forgive him; deprecated her coldness; and implored her to retract her refusal.

In putting aside the various papers that were about him when taken ill, Lady Marchmont's note fell into her hands. She read it, among others, requiring immediate answer, little, till then, supposing that it had been kept, with all the bitterness of memory, for months. Its contents were as follow:—

"Dear Lord Norbourne,—I regret having to communicate what has been the result of my conversation with Miss Churchill; I am afraid that all women are a little unforgiving, when the inconstancy of a lover is to be pardoned. I see clearly that nothing will induce her to listen to Mr. Courtenaye. Ethel is gentle and timid, but there is, also, a degree of firmness, for which I did not give her credit. The sooner the matter is put an end to, the better. Life presents too brilliant an aspect to Mr. Courtenaye, not to console him for a single disappointment; that it may be his last, is the sincere wish of one who is,

"Most sincerely
"Your obliged
"Henrietta."

The note dropped from Mrs. Courtenaye's hand. What! then her son had still cherished his old attachment! He had offered, and been refused! There was that in her own nature, which sympathized with the pride, for such she held to be the motive, dictating the refusal. Then, resentment for her son's suffering became the predominant feeling. This could not last; and, for the first time, she thought what Ethel's sorrow might have been—sorrow that might well turn to after bitterness.

To find that you have been deceived, where you trusted so entirely; trifled with, where all your deepest and sweetest emotions had been called into life, is the most acute—the most enduring sorrow of which that life is capable. Mrs. Courtenaye started to think that she had never considered the matter in this light before.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SICK-ROOM.

'Tis midnight, and a starry shower
Weeps its bright tears o'er life and flower;
Sweet, silent, beautiful the night,
Sufficing for her own delight.
But other lights than sky and star,
From yonder casement gleam afar;
The lamp subdued to the heart's gloom
Of suffering, and of sorrow's room.

Since the commencement of her son's illness, Mrs. Courtenaye had never quitted his bed-side, but when exhausted nature forced her to take that repose from which she shrunk. To-night she took her accustomed place; for, during the night, no vigilance could satisfy her but her own: any eye but hers might close in momentary forgetfulness.

Down she sat, the lamp lighted, but its flame carefully screened from the sick man's face. The little table beside, supplied with all that could be needed, was at her side; her rosary in her hand, and again she began another vigil. Norbourne had at length fallen into a heavy sleep, and every hope hung on the state in which he might awaken from it. Mrs. Courtenaye could scarcely restrain herself from starting up in agony, when she thought on what the morrow might bring forth. The room was dark, but she was accustomed to its dim light, and there was not a feature in that white face—white as the pillow on which it rested—in which the slightest change was not distinctly visible to her. She rose, and bent over the sleeper: there was something in the utter helplessness of sickness that reminded her of infancy. A lapse of years went by, and she did not see the young man laid before her, but the little child, that loved no one but herself, whose whole world was fashioned by herself; she felt that her whole life had been devoted to him; and yet, had her object been accomplished? was he happy? and the answer seemed to come, cold and distinct on her ear—No!

Mrs. Courtenaye had never forgiven her husband the deception, or rather the thoughtlessness, that marked his conduct towards her. From the moment that she became aware of her real position, a feeling of mingled dislike and coldness arose,

which no kindness, not even submission, on his part, ever softened again. She was at once humiliated and embittered; but the warm heart, and the strong mind, must have an object; and her energies, equally with her affections, had concentrated themselves on her son.

In urging his marriage with Constance, she had been actuated, quite as much by consideration for him, as for herself; but now it appeared to her only selfishness; she had urged him on her own account. Of an unyielding and severe nature herself, she had exaggerated Lord Norbourne's determination, who certainly would never have acted upon the knowledge he possessed; but now she only thought of how her entreaties had wrought with her son. She cleared the mist that had gathered before her sight, and looked long and earnestly on the face of the patient. There were symptoms of recovery not to be mistaken; the feverish flush had died away, and the breathing was regular; she ventured to touch the forehead with her lips, it was cool, and the pulse was subdued. Again she resumed her seat, but the expression of her countenance was changed; the working of some strong emotion was in the troubled lines of her mouth. Gradually, the fine features settled into a lofty and resolute composure; the eyes, large and dark, filled with a light, spiritual and calm. She rested the crucifix on the table; and, kneeling before it, was, for some moments, absorbed in earnest prayer. She clasped her hands, and raised them towards heaven, when her devotion was disturbed by the faint movements of the invalid. She sprang to the bedside in a moment; Norbourne was just awaking. His eyes slowly unclosed; and, for the first time for many days, he was sensible he saw her bending over him; and the first faint words of returning consciousness were,—

"My mother! my dear mother!"

CHAPTER XL.

LADY MARCHMONT'S JOURNAL.

We might have been!—these are but common words,
And yet they make the sum of life's bewailing;
They are the echo of those finer chords,
Whose music life deplores when unavailing.—
We might have been!

Alas! how different from what we are,
Had we but known the bitter path before us!
But feelings, hopes, and fancies, left afar,
What in the wide, bleak world can e'er restore us?—
We might have been!

It is now a fortnight since I have seen him! How often have I wished that he had been one of our party here; and yet but for this absence, I should never have had his letters; I should never have known him as I now do. What a world of thought and of feeling have they not revealed! Till now, I never did him justice. I have sometimes thought him, in conversation, too merely amusing; too ready to laugh at enthusiasm,—at what is most true and generous in our nature. How wrong I was! wit, with him, was only the sparkle of the waters which hide precious things in the depths below. I can enter into the sensitiveness which is fain to keep that which it prizes most dearly, hidden from a cold and mocking world. I enter completely into his scorn of our present state of society, so false, so mean; and yet I was scarcely prepared for this dark misanthropy, which dissects so unsparingly, and throws its cold searching light, into all the miserable retreats of our small vanities and absurd pretensions.

How false we are, how unkind! I do not find that I can quite force myself to follow in the track of his glorious aspirations for the future, but how I respect him for the belief! Will the time ever come, when men will feel that the mind and the heart must work in concert, and that we must look around and afar for our happiness; that our great mistake has been, the narrow circle to which we are content to limit good? Alas! there is a weight upon my spirits; my wings are of wax, they melt in the effort that would seek the heavens. But much of

this originates in my own peculiar position: it is a hard one, and a false one!

I love Sir George Kingston; love him with all that is most tender in my feelings, most generous in my thoughts. I could be happy only to know his happiness. Had we met in earlier years my existence would at once have found its object; there would not have been this perpetual struggle between myself and my circumstances. Too late do I find that affection is woman's only element; to love, to look up, is her destiny; and, if unfulfilled, nothing can supply its place. Life has no real business for her beyond the sweet beating of her own heart dwelling in the shadow of another's. She may crowd her days with gaiety, variety, and what are called amusements; she will do so only to find their insufficiency. She needs the strength of duty, and the interest of affection. But I—I tremble at my happiness! my life is a struggle with my feelings and my circumstances! Sometimes I wish that I had never seen him, and then I have not courage to deny myself what has been such an unutterable source of enjoyment.

It is strange, but I love him best in his absence! then my imagination creates all that it wishes; all that I admire in him grows the richer for memory's setting: then I can imagine an existence that enables me to show my utter devotion without a fault. I start back with sudden horror, when I remember what even he may think of me. The love which should be my pride, the dearest hope which earth can raise to heaven, to me is degradation and misery. The deceit that I practise towards Lord Marchmont sinks me to his own level. I despise him: alas! I should rather despise myself.

She flung the pen down, and began to pace the room with those hurried steps which so often indicate the troubled mind, the inward suffering—fear, mingled with remorse: there was, unconfessed even to herself, a still and hushed dread that the worst was yet to come. Lady Marchmont already began to shrink from the future.

CHAPTER XLI.

DISCOVERY.

Who, that had looked on her that morn,
Could dream of all her heart had borne?
Her cheek was red, but who could know
'Twas flushing with the strife below?
Her eye was bright, but who could tell
It shone with tears she strove to quell?
Her voice was gay, her step was light,
And beaming, beautiful, and bright:
It was as if life could confer
Nothing but happiness on her.
Ah! who could think that all so fair
Was semblance, and but misery there!

"I cannot understand the cause of Sir George Kingston's not calling this morning; he knows that I am returned to town:" and a flush of haughty anger colored Lady Marchmont's brow; but the colour deepened when she looked at the time-piece, and had been expecting him for hours. How many changes had passed over her mind during that time! At first, there had been only that intense and passionate delight which fills the very soul at the thought of seeing a beloved object. Gradually came on the wonder of the loving heart, that any thing in the world could induce him to delay such happiness. Then thoughts, less entirely of eager and uncalculating affection, intervened:—the flattered and spoiled beauty was surprised that she should be kept waiting. But mortification was of short endurance. Henrietta felt too deeply for small vanity, she soon grew anxious; and if there be one torture which the demons, who delight in human misery, might rejoice to inflict, it is the anxious suspense of love acting upon an imaginative temperament. It is extraordinary the power of creation with which the mind seems suddenly endowed, and only to suppose the worst. Death, sickness, crime, misfortune,—these are the images which start upon the solitude made fearful with their presence. But there mingled among them, for Lady Marchmont, a spectre darker than the rest—remorse. Whatever sorrow might be hanging over her head, and her punishment might be greater than she could bear, she bitterly acknowledged that it would be just.

At this moment a note was brought in, its perfume reached her before itself. She knew it was from Sir George.

"Any answer?" asked she, with a careless coldness, belied by her flushed cheek and trembling hand.

"None," replied the servant; and Lady Marchmont was left alone: only then had she courage to open it. It contained a few hasty lines:—

"How have I offended you? Twice have I called this morning, and each time you have been peremptorily denied. What unknown crime, Henrietta—if I dare still call you so—have I committed? Shall you be at Lady Townshend's masked ball tonight? In the course of the evening I shall send you some flowers; I implore you to wear them. Not but what I should know you under any disguise; still wear them as a sign, that I may hear my fate from your lips. Till then, as through life,

Your devoted Servant,
GEORGE KINGSTON."

Lady Marchmont read the note in mute astonishment. She clasped her hands for a moment tightly together, and the blood sprang from the bitten lip; she then slowly but calmly, approached the table and rang the hand bell. The servant immediately appeared.

"Did you misunderstand my orders?" said she. "I desired Mademoiselle Cecile to say, that I should be at home this morning.

The man appeared a little embarrassed, and replied with some hesitation:—"Lord Marchmont has, perhaps, forgotten to tell your ladyship that he gave the porter a list of names, including all those who were henceforth never to be admitted; and it so happens, your ladyship, that the list includes almost all who have called to-day."

"If such were Lord Marchmont's orders, of course they are also mine," replied Henrietta, with desperate calmness.

The man left the room, and she sank back, pale and cold, on the sofa; but her agony was too great for fainting. There could be but one motive for Lord Marchmont's conduct; and yet she felt almost grateful to him. He had not exposed her to general comment; Sir George Kingston was only excluded among others. She had not given him credit for so much deli-

cacy; it touched her to the heart; she felt capable of any sacrifice to repay it.

At that moment she heard Lord Marchmont's step upon the stairs. A world of agony was in the next few moments; every slow and heavy step of her husband fell, like a death blow, upon Henrietta's ear. The door opened, and she cowered among the cushions of the couch. She had resolved to confess all, to implore his pardon, to submit never to see Sir George again; but now the words died upon her lips, and there she leant, pale and breathless, with what just seemed to herself strength to hear the worst, and then die upon the spot. She had not courage to look up. Lord Marchmont approached in his usual deliberate manner, seated himself in an arm chair opposite, and said,—

"I have some more than usually pleasant intelligence this morning—intelligence I was not authorized to communicate till within the last hour."

Henrietta could scarcely believe her ears: there was any thing but anger or jealousy in the tones of his voice; and when, at last, she ventured to catch his eye, there was only his usual calm expression of self-complacency.

"I have just seen," continued he, "Sir Robert Walpole, who has honoured me with a long and confidential conversation. I now completely comprehend his views."

Bewildered as Henrietta felt, the quotation from the old ballad rose to her memory when she heard Lord Marchmont talk of comprehending Sir Robert's views,—

> "But what's impossible cannot be,
> And never, never comes to pass;"

but she preserved a discreet silence, and his lordship contitinued:—

"Our admirable and patriotic minister has agreed with me in the necessity of drawing our party as much together as possible. An immense deal may be done by conciliation; and I have promised Sir Robert to give a series of splendid entertainments."

The fact was, that Walpole had been in utter despair what to do with their new acquisition, he was so useless in every way. At length Lord Norbourne started the brilliant idea of making him dinner-giver to their party. People forgive their host being a bore, when the fact is all but concealed by champagne and venison.

"It is fortunate," added Lord Marchmont, "that I am not

jealous, or I should have been quite alarmed at Sir Robert's eulogiums on your beauty."

"I am much obliged," said the countess, coldly, who was turning in her mind the best way of introducing the interdicted list.

Lord Marchmont saved her the trouble. "I quite forgot to see you this morning before I went out. Let me tell you now, while I think of it, that I gave the porter a list, this morning, of every one of our acquaintance who had the least leaning to the other side, that, in future, they might not obtain admittance;" so saying, he gave his wife also a list of names. "I copied them out for you, that you, might avoid them in public."

"Why," exclaimed Henrietta, "you have included all the pleasantest people that we know; many, too, of your oldest acquaintances."

"I cannot," said his lordship, with a solemn air, "allow my own feelings to interfere with my duty to my country: but I know that you do not understand these things. You must," said he, pausing on the threshold of the door, "be content to obey."

"Obey!" muttered Henrietta, with a scornful sneer, as she sank back on the sofa. Still she felt too sad for scorn long to be the predominant emotion; and she yielded to the sadness—it was an atonement. That night she resolved to see Sir George Kingston, and bid him farewell for ever.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE MASKED BALL.

Life is made up of vanities—so small,
So mean, the common history of the day,—
That mockery seems the sole philosophy.
Then some stern truth starts up—cold, sudden, strange;
And we are taught what life is by despair:—
The toys, the trifles, and the petty cares,
Melt into nothingness—we know their worth;
The heart avenges every careless thought,
And makes us feel that fate is terrible.

Amid the many mirrors called into requisition by Lady Townshend's *fête*, not one gave back a lovelier likeness than that which reflected the face and form of Lady Marchmont. She was dressed after a picture which had impressed her imagination from a child, in her uncle's collection. It was called "The Enchantress;" but the real name, for it was obviously a portrait, and that of the artist, had long since been forgotten. The style of costume was peculiar and striking; but it suited the present as much as it had done the former wearer. The robe was of black velvet, fitting tight to the shape, with large, loose, hanging sleeves, lined with scarlet silk. Round the waist was a rope of pearls, from which hung large tassels; and the deep border was of various colors, forming an Etruscan pattern of small strange characters.

There were no ornaments on the neck and arms; indeed, Lady Marchmont had used up the principal of hers to form the curious head-dress of the picture. The hair was formed into one thick braid, which went round and round the head: amid the folds of this was wound a serpent of precious stones, whose head, formed of rubies and diamonds, rose out of the knot behind, and made a sort of crest. Two little wings, about the size of a butterfly's, were on either side of the serpent's head; and the brilliants, of which they were composed, caught every ray of passing light.

At her side was a bouquet of red and white roses, they had been sent that evening, with one single line,—"I hope and I fear!"

The poet who first likened his mistress' eyes to the midnight, must have gazed on such orbs as those of that young and lovely

countess. There was the moonlight—clear, melancholy, and spiritual; but there was also the shadow of the coming storm—the radiance that is of the meteor, and the darkness that is of the cloud. There was a troubled and unquiet brightness in those dark black eyes, which revealed the passionate workings of the fevered spirit and the beating heart. The cheek was flushed to the richest crimson; and there was that quiver about the muscles of the mouth which betrays, more than any other external sign, the subdued emotion.

Henrietta was under the influence of strong excitement; every nerve had been overstrained during the day, and they were now braced with the forced composure of a desperate resolve. She was too agitated to rest: more than once she opened a volume, but only to close it hastily again without reading a single line; and then, starting from her seat, she resumed her hasty walk up and down the room.

The chair being announced, she fastened on her mask, and drew her domino round her, it not being her intention to display her splendid and fantastic costume till supper, when all the guests were expected to unmask. On her entrance into the ball-room, she drew her dark envelope more closely round; but in her hand there were the red and white roses.

"Ah, I needed not those signal flowers," said a low, sweet voice; and, garbed as a Spaniard, which suited well with his stately figure, Sir George Kingston came to her side. She took his arm in silence; all she had intended to say seemed like the words of a dream; for a few, a very few, moments she could be alive to nothing but the happiness of his presence.

Love has to every one its separate emotions; but there is one sensation common to all—the hurried, confused pleasure, which puts every thing else aside, of meeting.

Lady Marchmont heard none of the voices around her, saw nothing of the glittering crowd; her eyes were fixed on the ground. She did not venture to look at her companion; and yet her whole being was absorbed in his. While away from him she had framed her discourse, she had arranged the many reasons of farewell, she had convinced with argument, she had subdued him with entreaty; and now that she was at his side, what did she say?—nothing! and is not this a common case? Who ever said one half of all that seemed in absence so easy to say?

The rooms at Lady Townshend's were much crowded, and there was something very odd in the quaint and strange looking

figures that were assembled. Princesses, nuns, knights, pilgrims, bandits, and monks, mixed together with a superb defiance of the historical truths of costume that would have driven an antiquary mad.

But there always is in my mind something at once ludicrous and mournful in a crowd congregated for the purpose of amusement. What discontent, what vanity, move the complicated wheels of the social machine! There are many pleasures that one can comprehend, and even go the length of admitting, that they are worth some trouble in endeavouring to obtain; but the mania of filling your house with guests of whom you know little, and for whom you care nothing, is only less incomprehensible than why they should be at the trouble of coming to you.

The Arabs of the desert, who gather beneath the shadow of the palm-tree to listen to some tale of wild enchantment, have an actual pleasure. The moonlight shows their dark eyes kindling with eager enjoyment, as they hear how the warrior gained his beautiful maiden at last. But this is not the case with our modern assemblings; no one can accuse them of wearing faces of eager enjoyment. They are *blasé* and languid: to-morrow they will admit how tired they were of the party of the previous night; but the admission is made on their way to another.

Lady Townshend's *fête* was no exception to the general rule, excepting, perhaps, that a masquerade, by having a character for wit to support, is a little more wearisome, by being more forced than any thing else.

Lady Mary Wortley, who was there in her pretty oriental dress, accurate from the gold embroidered slippers to the sprig of jessamine in her plaited hair, thought it rather more tiresome than usual; for, by ill luck, Lord Marchmont had stationed himself at her side; and for a dull man to attempt persiflage, is more than mortal patience can endure. Glancing round, she saw Lady Marchmont and Sir George Kingston, whom her quick eye had recognised at once, enter a balcony which looked towards the garden.

"I tell you, *beau masque*," said her ladyship, "you are wasting time upon me that might be much better bestowed. There is Sir George Kingston busy making love to your wife. Don't you think that you had better look a little after her?"

"Oh, I am not at all alarmed," replied Lord Marchmont.

"Well," replied Lady Mary, "there is some Christian charity left in this wicked world. It is quite charming of you to de-

vote yourself to the amusement of the town as you do. Why, every body is laughing at your blindness."

"How very ridiculous!" exclaimed he.

"Is Lord Marchmont talking of himself?" asked a mask behind: but while his lordship turned round to discover who was his new tormentor, Lady Mary effected her escape; and Lord Marchmont, finding himself near no one that he knew, began to consider whether he might not as well follow her advice.

Lady Mary's had been just a random assertion only thrown out to get rid of a wearisome companion; and yet to what important consequences it led! But it is the inevitable consequence of guilt, it places its punishment on a chance; and that chance is sure to occur.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A SCENE AT THE MASQUERADE.

> I do not say, bequeath unto my soul
> Thy memory, I rather ask forgetting;
> Withdraw, I pray, from me thy strong control;
> Though, that withdrawn, what has life worth regretting?
> Alas! this is a miserable earth!
> Too late, or else too soon, the heart-beat quickens:
> Hope finds too late its light was nothing worth,
> And round a dark and final vapour thickens.

The silken folds of the crimson curtain which hung over the window, and a stand of odoriferous plants, almost concealed the balcony where Henrietta and Sir George were standing. Behind them were the illuminated rooms, from whence came gleams of light as the curtains waved to and fro; and the sound of voices, lost in the music, swept but softened towards them.

Below was the garden, a scene of complete tranquillity; the trees were old and thickly grown, the lights from the windows seemed to play over their dense foliage, but not to penetrate it.

The air rose fresh and sweet, and Henrietta had taken off her mask. The face was pale as the moonlight which fell over it,

and her large sad eyes were raised towards Sir George, with an expression so hopeless, so deprecating, that even he shrank from meeting them.

"You know that I love you," said she, in a low, faint whisper,—"love you as those love who have but a single object on which the affections can fix. I love you miserably, desperately!"

"But you love your own pride better," exclaimed her companion.

"Pride!—ah, no!" returned Henrietta. "I have no pride but in you. I could be content to be a slave, a beggar, for your sake. All that I ever read of my sex's devotion seems possible—nay, natural, when I think of what I feel for you. I should hold my life as nothing, could it purchase your happiness."

"And yet," interrupted Sir George, "you can calmly, coldly condemn me to the most insupportable misery."

"I am very wretched," muttered she, rather to herself than to him.

"Rather say capricious and inconstant," replied her companion.

"Alas!" replied she, "I deserve these reproaches for having ever listened to you. Sir George, I have done wrong, inexcusably wrong; but the hopeless, the dreary future that lies before me, might atone for my fault."

"And so you will," exclaimed he, "sacrifice me for Lord Marchmont, whom you both despise and hate?"

"I do despise, I do hate him!" returned Henrietta, bitterly; "but not the less, I am his wife. Listen to me, Sir George. I cannot endure the humiliation of my own reproaches; to-morrow I will return your letters. I will, at least, try to avoid seeing you;—but, surely, that was a step."

"It was only the wind in the curtain," said Sir George, who, like herself, had started at some slight noise.

"Alas!" exclaimed she, is not this very fear degrading? Why should I care that my words may be overheard? Why should I shrink from discovery?"

"Ah," exclaimed her companion, "if you loved me with but a shadow of the love that I bear towards you, you would not dread a little risk—it is but a little—for my sake."

"Ah," cried Henrietta, "do you think it is merely the consequence from which I shrink?" Ah, if my own heart did but tell me that I was right, how little I should care for any thing else!"

"I care for nothing but yourself," interrupted her companion. "Have you no pity for the misery that you will inflict upon me?"

Henrietta's voice failed her, she could only wring her hands with a passionate gesture of entreaty. Sir George saw his advantage, and continued:—

"I know that it is selfish to urge my happiness; but, dearest! sweetest! it is so wholly in your hands. But, you are pale, my beloved; come in from the damp air."

"You shall find my chair," said Henrietta, faintly; for the emotion with which she had contended was becoming too much for her. "I must go home."

"You have scarcely been here half an hour; but," said he, making a merit of obedience, "I will not urge your stay, I see that you are not equal to it. If you did but know how I hang on your least look, you would not dream of depriving me even of but one of them."

The chair was soon found; and, as Sir George turned away, he drew a deep breath. "On my honour! a grand passion is very fatiguing. I have half a mind to take her at her word—have one last scene of repentance, be converted and there let the matter end. But—no: an unfinished conquest is almost a defeat. I cannot allow remorse to master love—love of which I am the object: it is not being properly appreciated: I must throw in more despair. 'This do I, oh, Athenians! for your applause,'" exclaimed he, as he turned into his club to see if he could find one or two pleasant friends for supper.

CHAPTER XLIV.

LORD MARCHMONT'S JEALOUSY.

You never loved me! never cared for me!
Had I been taken kindly to your heart,
This present misery were all unknown:
But I have been neglected and repelled;
My best affections chilled or left to feed
Upon themselves. I have so needed love,
I should have loved you but from gratitude,
If you had let me.

Henrietta felt quite overcome with bodily indisposition as she proceeded homewards. Her hands were feverish, her temples throbbed with acute pain; she was wretched, but there was confusion in her thoughts; she seemed as if it were impossible to dwell on any one subject for even a moment. A dead weight was upon her spirits, they had been strained to the utmost. Intending to lie down at once, she began unfastening the glittering bands of her hair even while going up stairs; but her hands sank down, and she stood fixed on the threshold as she entered.

There sat Lord Marchmont; having broken open her writing-desk, he was looking over the letters; too well did his wife know what he would discover. The very epistle that he was reading she recognised at once. The contents ran thus:—

"You say that you despise your husband, that but for dislike you would forget his very existence: your high and generous nature avenges itself. It could have no sympathy with the true or the noble if it sympathized with him. The great fault of his character must be its extreme littleness. There is not room for the warm blood to circulate, for the loftier emotion to expand. You —so sensitive, so high minded—what can you have in common with him?"

The rustle of Henrietta's dress drew his attention; he looked up, and saw her standing, pale and motionless, on the threshold.

"You are earlier than I expected, madam," exclaimed he, starting up, and leading, or rather dragging, her forward, "considering in what agreeable society I left you! I am sure my house is much honoured by your return; but you do not stay

here long; I have a great mind to turn you into the streets to-night."

Henrietta felt sinking, but she did not faint; the worst was come, and there was that in herself which seemed to rise to meet it. In a better cause, what fortitude, what endurance, would have belonged to her nature! even humiliated, self-convicted as she felt, her native pride could not quite desert her. Still, the blood curdled at her heart, the lip trembled; but it could not yet force itself to speak.

"And so these pretty letters are addressed to my wife," continued Lord Marchmont; "a fine return for all my kindness! and to see, too, what you say of me! I always knew I was a great deal too good for you. But I'll tell you what, madam, all the town shall know of your infamous conduct; and you shall pass the rest of your life in a farm-house in the country."

"Ah! any miserable place," murmured Henrietta, "so that it be but solitude."

"Where you could receive Sir George Kingston; but I will take care to prevent that," interrupted he. "I overheard all your conversation to-night."

"If you overheard our conversation," exclaimed Lady Marchmont, "you overheard also my remorse. You know that, though imprudent, I am not guilty; and that I was myself about to break off a correspondence, whose fault, whose folly, none could feel more bitterly than I did myself."

"I heard all you said about me," interrupted Lord Marchmont, not the least attending to what she was saying. "I never knew such ingratitude! Look at your house, at your carriage; there was nothing in the world that you wanted."

"Yes," said Henrietta, "what you never gave me—a heart. Lord Marchmont, I have done wrong, very wrong; but you have been wrong also."

"Oh, yes! of course," cried he; "lay the blame upon me. It is a lucky thing that your uncle is dead, he would not like having you sent back disgraced on his hands."

"Thank God that he cannot know my shame and misery!" exclaimed the countess, while the mention of her uncle brought the tears to her eyes; but they were not allowed to fall, they only glistened on the eye-lash. "Lord Marchmont," continued she, "you yourself know that I am what is called innocent; but I do not for a moment extenuate the error I have committed. But I have some claims on your forbearance. Ask your own heart

if it has ever shown to me that affection which is woman's best safety."

"How am I to be made answerable for the romantic nonsense which Sir George Kingston has put into your head?" asked he, angrily.

"Ah!" exclaimed she, "what I now urge I have felt ever since I arrived in London. You have never cared for me, or cautioned me against the many dangers which surrounded my vain and heedless career."

"How could I tell that you would turn out so badly?" again he asked.

"Lord Marchmont," cried Henrietta, "there is yet time to save me from utter wretchedness and crime. I am young, very young—forgive me, and my whole life shall be devoted to atone for the past, and to show my gratitude."

"And," answered he, with a sneer, "you will take care not to be found out next time."

"I do not deserve this," said she. "Lord Marchmont, at your feet, I implore your pardon?" and she knelt as she spoke: "give me but one proof of your confidence, and my whole life shall show it has not been given in vain."

"Madam," said he, throwing her from him, "you forget how glad I shall be to get rid of you." So saying, he left the room, and she heard him order supper as he went down stairs.

The fact was, that Lord Marchmont had long disliked his wife: he did not understand her wit, and he feared it. The very admiration she inspired, displeased him; it gave him an uncomfortable feeling as to her superiority.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE LETTERS.

It is a weary and a bitter hour
When first the real disturbs the poet's world,
And he distrusts the future. Not for that
Should cold despondency weigh down the soul:
It is a glorious gift, bright poetry,
And should be thankfully and nobly used.
Let it look up to heaven!

"It is earlier than I thought," said Walter Maynard, as the sound of one of the French clocks disturbed the gloomy reverie in which he had been plunged; "but I have not spirits to go out. Every day I feel more and more disinclined to the least exertion; and yet I never was in a position that demanded it more. Debts, difficulties, surround me on every side; and yet I cannot force myself to that employment which would soon release me from them.

"The iron has entered into my soul, and it weighs me down to earth. I cannot bear staying here, the office of Sir George's secretary is too degrading. To what use am I turning the talents once destined to achieve such lofty purpose! I am applying them to the meanest deceits,—to gratify the miserable vanity of a man, as much my inferior by nature as he is my superior by fortune. I cannot continue to live with Sir George; I despise him too thoroughly. Every day I decide on leaving him. I act against every sense I have of right in staying; and yet I lack the resolution to leave."

Walter leant his head upon his arm, and remained lost in thought. He did not take into consideration his shattered health; consumption had already begun its work, and he drooped beneath its fever—that fever whose re-action is languor. But he referred his distaste only to the mind, which he felt was exhausted and depressed within.

Few know the demands made by the imagination on those who are once its masters and its victims. Its exercise is so feverish, and so exciting; the cheek burns, the pulse beats aloud, the whole frame trembles with eagerness during the progress of composition. For the time you are what you create. The exhaustion of this

process is not felt till some other species of exertion makes its demand on the already overwrought frame, the overstrained nerves begin to discover that they have been wounded to the utmost. There is no strength left to bear life's other emotions.

Poverty, the effort made in society; love, fretted out of "the lovely land of dreams," by being often in the presence, and perpetually hearing of the object whose possession is hopeless;—all these combined to wear out Maynard's sensitive and shrinking frame. Moreover, there is a time when every writer asks himself, has he not followed the shadow, not the substance? that his noblest hopes, his most earnest aspirations, have been given those who know not what the gift has cost.

Fame seems afar off, and cold sunshine; and that eager readiness of thought, which found in the slightest thing matter for some graceful fancy, which at once sprang into music, seems cold and dead within us.

There are times when the poet marvels how he ever wrote, and feels as if he never could write again. Alas! it is this world's worst curse, that the body predominates over the mind; and this was just now the case with Walter Maynard.

He was roused from his meditation by a light touch on the shoulder: it was Lavinia Fenton, of whom he had lately seen but little. The fact was, he had carefully avoided her society; but to-night he felt glad of any one who broke in upon the gloomy shadow of his own thoughts.

"My cold is so bad to-night," said she, "that I cannot venture out; and, not knowing what to do with myself, came to see if I could find amusement here. I have found you, and that is better than nothing."

"I was just thinking," replied Walter, "that I was worse than nothing."

"Well, it is not every one," answered she, laughing, "who forms such a just estimate of themselves. I do not think that modesty is a virtue very often rewarded in this world; however, I shall take upon myself to reward it to-night by drinking tea with you."

"And I will tell you an idea that has struck me," replied he, "as a good ground-work for a drama. I do not know how it is, but I need more encouragement than I used to do, to begin any thing new. Now, talking over a plan, is a sort of beginning; and, careless as you are, you have an intuitive judgment."

"Because," interrupted the actress, "I see things exactly as they are. I calculate my effects, but they do not deceive my-

self; you, on the contrary, live in a world of illusions, where every thing is called by such an exceedingly fine name, that it seems a downright impertinence to ascertain what it really is."

"Why, as you say," exclaimed Walter, "an epithet does go a great way. It is not so much what a thing is, as what it is called."

Lavinia's only reply was, to hum a stanza from the opera, then in its earliest popularity:—

"'Since laws were made for every degree,
For others, as well as for you and for me;
I wonder we have not better company
On Tyburn tree.'

I am as hoarse as a raven, begging my own pardon for the comparison. Now, what has led to my train of thoughts to-night is, looking over Sir George Kingston's love-letters."

"Does he show them to you?" asked Walter, with uncontrollable surprise.

"Why, what do you think he keeps them for, but to show? They are really quite encouraging to me: there is not so much difference between the green room and the drawing-room; only, to be sure, my coquetry is paid for!"

"How little real love," said Maynard, "there is in the world! —how many other baser feelings usurp its name!"

"They may," cried Lavinia, "be generally classed under two heads,—idleness and vanity. There are more love affairs originating in the want of something to do, than from any other motive. The lover and the physician are each popular from the same cause—we talk to them of nothing but ourselves; I dare say that was the origin of confession—egotism, under the fine name of religion."

"Sir George Kingston is very egotistical," said Walter; "I observe that, let the topic be what it will, it winds round to himself!"

"You would not wonder," returned Lavinia, "if you could but know the world of flattery which he contrives to obtain. Believe me, that a very vain man cannot do better than devote himself to our sex; no where else will he have his vanity so soothed, and so fed."

"But," interrupted Walter, "it is man's part to flatter women!"

"Not half so much as women flatter men," cried the actress. "We are more ingenious, more refined and ready, than you

are. Besides, we imply, where you express; and flattery, by implication, is the most subtle and penetrating of all. And, lastly, there is more of the heart in what we utter; we do feel a little of what we say."

"And you mean to imply," exclaimed her companion, "that we do not!"

"Yes," answered she. "I lay it down as a rule, the truth of which all experience confirms, that every man behaves as ill as he possibly can to every woman, under every possible circumstance!"

"A sweeping censure!" cried Walter.

"And, like all sweeping censures," said she, "if not true of, perhaps, one or two wonderful exceptions, it applies strictly to the generality. What man has the slightest scruple as to gaining the confidence; making himself not only necessary to her happiness, but that very happiness itself; and then sacrificing her to vanity, caprice, or any slight motive, that would not be held valid for one moment in any other matter!"

"And yet," exclaimed Walter, "what a delicious and a precious trust is that affection which yields its sweetest hopes to your keeping! you are in the place of destiny, to the woman who loves you."

"Do you know, Walter, that, though I know what you are saying is great nonsense," interrupted Lavinia, "I cannot help liking you for the deep, true feeling, you carry into every thing. Still, even you only confirm me in my creed; the warm emotion, the generous faith, only place you in the power of others, and power is what we all abuse. You, with your kind heart, your lofty talents, are you happy?"

"Oh, you know I am not!" exclaimed Walter. "I feel that I shall never be what I have powers to become: I cannot make the future my home, as I used to do."

"A most unsubstantial one!" cried the actress; "give me the praise that rings upon the ear; the applause that comes over the foot-lights! But I am still hoarser with talking, and here comes the tea; and, to console you for my interruption, I will quote your own lines:—

> The fairer flowers are those which yield not fruit;
> Our highest thoughts grow never into acts."

CHAPTER XLVI.

A DISCOVERY.

It is a fearful trust, the trust of love.
In fear, not hope, should woman's heart receive
A guest so terrible. Ah! never more
Will the young spirit know its joyous hours
Of quiet hopes and innocent delights;
Its childhood is departed.

"The more I see of the world," continued Lavinia, sipping her bohea from a little china cup, that might have served Titania, "the more I am convinced that the principles with which I set out in life are the only ones to get on with. You ought to refer every thing to yourself—be your own idol. If a lover ruins himself for your amusement, you ask, what better could he have done with his fortune? If, by any odd chance, he was to do—what they all talk of doing—die for your sake! well, it is quite charming to be paid such an unusual compliment. It is curious to note, after all, that people take you very much on your own estimate! Modesty is only a proof of merit in 'Gay's Fables;' generally, it is taken as a tacit acknowledgment that you have nothing of which to be proud. My motto of '*je m'adore*,' is only what I expect!"

"Well, the exaggeration is pleasant enough," answered Maynard, smiling.

"It is truer than you like to admit. What makes Sir George Kingston—so false, so insolent, to others—a complete slave to my caprices? Only because I do not care for him! He knows I should only laugh at his desertion; and he would not like to be the one who was left, which he knows I should do for the first thwarted whim."

"And yet this man," muttered Walter, "can inspire deep and devoted attachments!"

"Not he! of all the letters in my possession, only one set convey to me the idea of real affection; and, odd enough, it is you who have inspired it! You know the correspondence you have been carrying on for Sir George."

"I do," said Walter, coloring; "and heartily am I ashamed of it! Now, I know him: I must and will put an end to it!"

"She says," continued Lavinia, "'but for your letters, I

should never have known you; therefore, never have loved you as I do!' but read for yourself," tossing one to him; "if Lady Marchmont's letters have touched even me, what effect will they take upon you!"

"Lady Marchmont!" cried Walter, in the most utter astonishment; "is it to Lady Marchmont that I have been writing?"

"To be sure it is!" replied the other: "did you not know it?"

"Sir George," said he, "never mentioned the name."

"It was sheer carelessness on his part, then," continued Lavinia, "for I am sure that he has no delicacy in the matter. I remember Lady Marchmont as if it were but yesterday—so beautiful, so proud! where would her pride be, if she could know that her letters were in my hands? And yet they might be in worse; for I, at least, pity her!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Walter, rising, and pacing the room, after reading a few passages from the letter he held in his hand, "never can I forgive myself! Every regret she expresses cuts me to the heart!"

"You do, indeed, seem to take it to heart!" exclaimed the actress, an expression of jealous anger crossing her features; "why, it is quite a God-send for you! many a heart is caught in the rebound. Tell her you wrote the letters; explain Sir George's treachery; and, my life upon it, but you will

'Bear off the honors of the well fought-day!'"

"And how," continued Walter, not attending to his companion—"how bitterly she reproaches herself! and to think that this earnest, this sorrowful love, has been a toy—an amusement—the result of such heartless treachery! I never can tell her—but I ought—I must!"

"Why, it is the very thing that I am advising you to do," cried Lavinia: "the game is in your own hands!"

"How little," said he, still rather thinking aloud, than talking, "did I think, while writing these letters, proud of their composition, what misery I was inflicting on another, and storing up for myself!"

"And little did I think," muttered Lavinia, "that I could have been so mistaken. I have always fancied that it was Miss Churchill who inspired you with all these fine verses; instead of that, it was Lady Marchmont!"

And a bitter jealousy took possession of her mind. She had grown accustomed to look upon Ethel as Walter's passion

and inspiration: it was something far off and distant, which even she felt was sacred; but Lady Marchmont was a new rival, and come too actual, and too near.

"I will tell you what, Lavinia," said Maynard, stopping short in his hurried walk, "you must give me those letters; and, painful as it is, I will at once take them to her, and make the disclosure!"

"Indeed I will do no such thing!" replied Lavinia, pettishly; "if Lady Marchmont likes to be made a fool of, what business is it of mine?"

Walter, who had been engrossed in his own thoughts, had not observed what was passing in his companion's mind, and stood amazed at what appeared to him such an unaccountable change.

"My dear Lavinia," exclaimed he, earnestly, "you wrong yourself; you are far too kind-hearted to have any satisfaction in the shame and misery to which keeping back those letters will inevitably expose Lady Marchmont!"

"What would she care for mine?" was the reply. "Besides, I really must look to myself: what will Sir George say?"

"Nothing to you," answered Maynard, "for I will take the whole upon myself!"

"It is of no use talking to me, for I will not do it?" cried Lavinia, passionately: "I see that you are in love with Lady Marchmont, and it is not me that you must expect to help you!"

A sudden light broke in upon Walter; and, for a moment, he felt awkward and embarrassed: but he was too deeply penetrated with the fault he had committed, too much touched with pity for its victim, to give up his point; besides, she had a claim upon him for her uncle's sake,—that uncle who had been his kindest and his first protector!

"I am quite tired," said the actress, rising, "and shall go to my own room. Good evening!"

"You shall not go," replied Walter, gently detaining her, "till your better self comes back; I thought you were above any such petty triumph over another!"

"You know I am not thinking of any such thing," answered she, sullenly: "but have the goodness to tell me, why I should help you to make love to Lady Marchmont?"

"I am sure," cried Walter, "I want your help in nothing of

the kind. I do not, I never could, love Lady Marchmont: you know,'" added he, in a faltering voice, "that I love another!"

It was with bitter reluctance that he said this; he could not bear even an illusion to Ethel's name; but it was the penalty of his own conduct: he could not allow Lavinia's most unfounded jealousy to interfere with the only reparation in his power. The actress felt that he spoke the truth; and, ashamed of the petulance that she had displayed, now sought to bring the subject round a little.

"But why should you interfere in the matter? It will ruin you with Sir George!—you will lose your situation!"

"Do you think," cried Walter, that I could keep it, after to-night? I would not, for twice his wealth, live with a man I so utterly scorn!"

"But you lose," said she, "his interest; and he has it in his power to do so much for you!"

"I could not submit to an obligation from Sir George Kingston!"

"I admit that you are right," replied Lavinia, slowly; but I feel an unaccountable reluctance that you should interfere in this matter."

"Listen to me for a moment," said Walter, "and seriously, Sir Jasper Meredith was my first and my best friend. If I possess the talents that have placed me in the very situation that I hold, I owe their cultivation to him. To what use have I turned them? to destroy the happiness of the being dearest to him upon earth! For his sake alone, I would lay down my life to restore those letters!"

"Poor, kind old man that he was," said the actress, "how he would have grieved over this! Well, the grave often saves us a world of trouble!"

"I stand amazed now," continued Walter, "at my own recklessness in writing them; but I am so accustomed to invent an existence, that I forget the consequence in the interest of the composition. Ah, I see that there is no wickedness so desperate as deception: we can never foresee its consequences!"

"You shall have the letters," said Lavinia, beginning to put them together: "I shall tell Sir George that I sent them to their right owner in a fit of jealousy, and he will only be flattered!"

"My dear Lavinia," said Walter, "I thank you most cordially; you know not the weight you have taken off my conscience;

as to Sir George, I shall see him myself when I return from Lady Marchmont's."

So saying, he took the letters; and, again thanking her, hurried away.

"I do pity her!" exclaimed Lavinia, as she went slowly up stairs; "the very humiliation of the letters being restored, is quite punishment enough, even for loving Sir George Kingston. It is the idol of her own fancy that she loves, not him!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE LETTERS RESTORED.

Alas! he brings me back my early years,
And seems to tell me what I should have been.
How have I wasted God's best gifts, and turned
Their use against myself! It is too late!
Remorse and shame are crushing me to earth,
And I am desperate with my misery!

A GOLDEN bribe won at least attention from the porter; and Walter knew that Lady Marchmont had returned, for her chair was being carried away from the door as he got up to it. Still the difficulty of obtaining admittance was great, and Maynard was vainly urging the importance of his business; when an old domestic, who had formerly lived with Sir Jasper Meredith, entered the hall. He knew Maynard at once; but he, too, demurred about the lateness of the hour.

"I know you love your mistress," said Walter, drawing the old man aside; "it is of vital consequence to herself that I should see her alone for a very few moments!"

The old man looked at him with a sort of startled surprise; but Walter was too pale and too agitated not to be in earnest.

"Come," said he, "to my room, I will take care that you see her ladyship."

Walter followed him into one of those small dark rooms, which so forcibly contrast the general magnificence of London, marking the social distinctions which exist under the same roof. The servant lighted a dull lamp, and left his visiter to a space that, to his impatience, seemed endless.

"I have been waiting," said the old man, "till I heard Lord Marchmont go down to supper; my lady is now alone in the dressing-closet. You see, Mr. Maynard, that I do not, for a moment, doubt but that your business justifies this unreasonable visit."

"It does, indeed!" exclaimed Walter, as he followed his guide.

"My lady is alone, for she has come in unusually early, so that Madame Cecile will not be returned these two hours, but I will wait in the antechamber."

They knocked at the door.

"Come in!" said a voice, strange and hollow.

"Madam," said the old man, "Mr. Walter Maynard says that he must see you for a moment on the most pressing business."

Lady Marchmont was still in the same attitude as when her husband left the room—half knelt, half crouched, on the floor. The mechanical restraint that we exercise over ourselves in the presence of our inferiors, made her start from her knee, and say, even calmly, "Oh, very well; show him in." But she did not know what she was saying; and when Walter, a moment after, entered, it took her quite by surprise. He had often seen her in public places, but she had never seen him since the last evening passed beside the little fountain; he seemed like the ghost of her youth suddenly risen up to reproach her. Both stood silent, gazing on each other; Walter was actually lost in admiration of Lady Marchmont's transcendent beauty. The black velvet robe, with its strange embroidery, suited so well her superb figure, and threw into such strong relief the dead fairness of her neck and arms. Her face was without a vestige of color, but it only showed more strongly the perfect outline of her features. Pale she was, but not like a statue; it was a human paleness—passionate and painful. Masses of her rich black hair fell over her shoulders, giving that wildness to the look which the dishevelled hair always does; but the glittering snake was yet wound round the head, and the ruby crest and diamond eye of the reptile had a strange likeness to life.

Lady Marchmont's eyes were unusually large; but to-night the face itself seemed half eyes, so dark and dilated were the shadowy pupils. But it was the expression of misery in her countenance, that riveted the attention; rarely before had so much anguish and beauty been combined in the same face. Some instinct told Walter that she was suffering, and he was come to add to it; still, the sooner what he had to say was said the better, and he was the first to break silence.

"Lady Marchmont," said he, "will pardon an intrusion dictated by anxiety on her account. Will she permit me to place these letters in her own keeping?"

Henrietta looked at them with a bewildered air; she knew them at once, for they were only kept together by a riband. A terrible fear rushed across her mind; was Sir George ill?—was he engaged in a duel? The idea of some danger to him was the only one that presented itself.

"Did he—did Sir George Kingston," asked she, faintly, "send no message, when he sent these letters?"

"He did not send them!" replied her visiter.

A deep flush, for one moment, suffused her neck, arms, face—even to the very temples—as she exclaimed, "How did they come into your possession?"

"Lady Marchmont," returned Maynard, "do sit down, and listen patiently, if you can, to me for five minutes!"

Henrietta obeyed like a child, indeed she could now scarcely stand; still, there was that consciousness about her, which made her turn her face a little aside. Walter hesitated, when she turned suddenly round:—

"For mercy's sake, tell me the worst; I can bear it better than suspense! What has happened to Sir George Kingston?"

"Do not give yourself any uneasiness about one so utterly unworthy of a thought! Sir George Kingston is without one grain of either honour or real feeling! The fact is, I have, for some months past, been his secretary, and wrote for him the letters which were sent you!"

"You wrote them!" cried Henrietta.

"I had not the least idea to whom they were addressed. I wrote, as I do the pages of a romance; and the Henrietta to whom they were addressed, was an ideal heroine!"

"Sir George did not write them himself!"

"He rarely read them, only just taking," replied the secretary, "a brief outline, lest he should betray himself in speaking!"

"Is it possible!" murmured Henrietta, "how I have been deceived!"

"I do not ask, I dare not hope, for your forgiveness," continued Walter; "but let me atone, as far as I can, by warning you against Sir George Kingston: he gave these very letters of yours to amuse the idle hours of his mistress!"

Henrietta gasped for breath; but she swallowed down the hysterical emotion, and signed with her hand for Walter to go on.

"I have little more to say; your secret is safe. I will answer for the young actress's silence; it were an impertinence to assure you of my own!"

Henrietta gazed upon him steadfastly; his presence brought back the first, the sweetest dream of her life. Her love for Sir George Kingston seemed to vanish like a shadow; deep in her heart she felt that it was a poor fanciful emotion, born of

vanity, and that craving for excitement, the inevitable result of her artificial state of existence. No; he whom she had really loved, stood there before her—pale, earnest—with the same dark and eloquent eyes, as when they used to kindle with light over the fine creations of the olden poets. Loving and beloved by him, how different would her destiny have been! An utter sense of desolation came over her; a terror of the future, an overwhelming agony in the present. That he, of all others, should be the one to witness her humiliation!

"I will trespass no longer," said Walter, after a moment's pause. "Let me hope that the bitterness of this moment will be forgotton in scorn. Good night, dear Lady Marchmont. God bless you!" And he pressed the hand that she extended towards him.

He started at the touch, for it burned like fire; and even in that momentary pressure, he could feel the pulses beat!

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MIDNIGHT.

Where is the heart that has not bowed
  A slave, eternal Love to thee?
Look on the cold, the gay, the proud,
  And is there one among them free?

And what must love be in a heart
  All passion's fiery depths concealing,
Which has in its minutest part
  More than another's whole of feeling!

HENRIETTA pressed her temples on the cushion, but it did not still their tumultuous pain. The door closed after Walter Maynard, and it sank like a knell upon her ear. She listened to his receding footsteps, and when they died away, she still held her breath to listen; there was a deep silence, and she felt utterly alone in the world. Strange how vividly her youth seemed to rise before her! she sat again beside her uncle, while Walter Maynard read aloud his boyish translation of the Prometheus bound; her uncle's words rang in her ear.

"So does destiny bind us on the rock of life, so does the vulture, Sorrow, prey on the core of every human heart!" Then she joined the little group that had gathered beside the fountain —so gay, so hopeful; what had they not, all of them, suffered since! She had witnessed the silent wasting of the heart which had banished the rose and the smile from the sweet face of Ethel Churchill; she knew that Norbourne Courtenaye was suffering all the bitterness of unavailing regret; and had she not just looked on Walter Maynard—pale, emaciated—with death in his face!

Slowly her thoughts reverted to herself; the blood rushed to her brow. What would she be to-morrow? the mark for obloquy and ridicule! disgraced, and for what? to minister to the wretched vanity of one whom she loathed even more than she scorned. She sprang to her feet; the crimson flood went back upon her heart; a strange light flashed from her eyes; her white lips were firmly compressed; and she clasped her hands so tightly, that the blood slightly tinged the ends of her fingers.

If ever an evil spirit be allowed to enter our frail human tene-

ment, such spirit would have seemed to enter into Henrietta Marchmont. A strange tranquillity passed over her; she rose from her seat, and wrote a note; there was a key, which she took from the table, enclosed in it. After carefully sealing the parcel, she rang; and when the servant came in, she said,—

"Let this parcel, late as it is, be taken immediately—I forgot it; and you may tell Madame Cecile, that I am so tired, I shall not wait for her: she may go to bed without disturbing me. Is Lord Marchmont come up from supper yet?"

"No, my lady. To-night, M. Chloe tries the new receipt for stewed mushrooms, that Sir Robert Walpole's cook gave him, and they are only this moment serving up, for my lord was home sooner than he was expected."

"And he can sit down quietly to decide on the merits of stewed mushrooms," muttered Lady Marchmont, as the servant closed the door, "while I—but no matter, I hope he will enjoy his supper!"

Her eyes flashed, and she laughed aloud; but she started herself at the strange, harsh sound of her own laugh.

"Ah, here it is!" exclaimed she, unfastening a small key, which hung to the chain that she always wore; she then opened a small casket that stood where few would have noticed it; but, nevertheless, fastened for security to its stand. From thence she took two small phials, each of a different shape, but each containing some clear liquid: one she hastily concealed in the folds of her dress; the other she kept in her hand: then, taking a lamp from the table, she left the room. Shading the light with the sleeve of her dress, she proceeded along the corridor, and, with a noiseless step, gained a large bed-room on the left. She listened for a moment, but all was quiet; and she glided in, pale and noiseless as a ghost.

It was Lord Marchmont's chamber, fitted up with all that luxury which marked how precious its master was in his own eyes at least. Within the purple hangings of the bed stood a table, where the night lamp was already burning; and, also, a draught, carefully labelled.

Lord Marchmont was fond of small complaints, and his physician's ingenuity was often taxed to find a remedy where there was no disease.

Henrietta took the bottle, and swallowed part of the contents; and then filled it up from the phial she held in her hand—that hand never trembled. Again she withdrew, cautiously and quietly as she came; and returned to her own room undisturbed.

She had scarcely reached it before she heard her husband pass by, on his way to bed. She sprang to the door, and her heart beat loudly: he might yet come in, and relent in her favor. Not so; the heavy step passed heavily onward; and again she sank amid the cushions of the chair. There she sat, wan as a statue, and motionless, save when a quick convulsive shudder, as if of pain, ran through her frame.

It was awful to watch the change one single evening had wrought in that beautiful face. The eyes were hollow; the features thin, as if suddenly contracted; and her brow had a slight frown, knit either with suffering, or rigid determination.

A clock, striking two in the distance, startled her; and, rising, she approached the window. The dew had risen heavily on the plants in the balcony; and the moonlight turned the park below into one sheet of tremulous silver. All was silent as the grave, excepting that hollow murmur, which never, even in its stillest hour, quite forsakes a great city. The trees stood dark, and not a leaf stirred on the heavy branches; but amidst them rose the stately abbey, the Gothic architecture gleaming, "like ebon and ivory," in the clear radiance of the moon. There was not a cloud on the deep blue sky; but the countess did not look forth to gaze on the eternal beauty of the night; she saw nothing but the little garden immediately below the window of her room; and she muttered, in a hoarse whisper—"Will he come?"

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE CHALLENGE.

'Tis a strange mystery, the power of words!
Life is in them, and death. A word can send
The crimson color hurrying to the cheek,
Hurrying with many meanings; or can turn
The current cold and deadly to the heart.
Anger and fear are in them; grief and joy
Are on their sound; yet slight, impalpable:—
A word is but a breath of passing air.

Maynard returned home direct from Lady Marchmont. To his surprise he learnt that Sir George was at home: such an early return was a very unusual thing with him. Walter was glad of it; he could not have borne to have passed the night without explanation; and hearing that Kingston was in the library, he at once hurried there, and found him, seemingly, alone and unoccupied.

"Maynard," exclaimed he, as his secretary entered, "do find something to say—I am dying of *ennui*."

"I have much to say," replied the other: "whether you may like to hear it, is another question."

The tone of his voice arrested Sir George's attention; a thing not easily done when the matter did not concern himself.

"Why," exclaimed he, "you look as pale as if you intended acting a tragedy instead of writing one! Where do you come from?"

"From Lady Marchmont, to whom I have restored all her letters," replied Maynard.

"Are you knave or fool, or both?" cried Sir George, starting from his seat. "What devil could tempt you to do any thing so absurd?"

"So right, you mean," replied Walter.

"And did you, as I suppose you did," asked Sir George, "make the most of your writing them for me?"

"I told her I wrote them every line."

"The devil you did!" exclaimed the other.

"And I told her, moreover, that if there was a man in the world devoid of one spark of honour, or one touch of feeling, that man was yourself."

"Mr. Maynard, this insolence is past bearing: leave the room this moment, meddling fool that you are!" cried Sir George,

whose surprise had now become rage. "To-morrow you shall leave this house for ever!"

"I shall not," replied the other, "wait your orders, or to-morrow either: I leave it for ever to-night!"

"The sooner the better!" exclaimed Sir George, "impertinent and ungrateful as you are!"

"I am not aware," answered Walter, "that there is any impertinence in expressing my opinion of your most dishonourable conduct; and I am not aware that I owe you any gratitude: will you permit me to ask you on what account?"

"This is past bearing," interrupted Kingston; "will you, sir, leave the room?"

"Not, sir, till you tell me when you will give me satisfaction for having made me the tool of your heartless designs."

Sir George burst into a loud fit of contemptuous laughter.

"Why, do you mean that for a challenge? Really it is too good your supposing that I should meet you. I thank you; but, really, must beg to decline the honour."

"You dare not," replied Walter; "you would shrink from the shame of refusing to meet me!"

"The shame of refusing to meet you!—from the shame of meeting an equal I might," said Kingston, tauntingly; "but it is absurd to be challenged by my hired servant—a low-born nobody!"

"Walter set his teeth. "You know that I am as much a gentleman as yourself!"

"In your own opinion," sneered the other.

"Really, it is very unpleasant to be interrupted in one's first sleep," said a young man, rising from the sofa where he had been lying; "what are you quarrelling about? I meant to have slept till supper. Come, let me be peacemaker."

"Never," said Walter; "but, perhaps, Lord Alfred, you will explain to Sir George, that his refusing to meet to-night will not tell to his credit to-morrow."

"Lord Alfred," replied Sir George, "will also have the goodness to state by whom the challenge was given—by my secretary, my hireling, my dependant."

"Not the last," interrupted Maynard; "I scorn you too much to depend upon you."

"Really," replied Sir George, "this farce grows tiresome. Mr. Maynard, I order you to leave the room."

"You have no right to order me. Give me the satisfaction to which I am so justly entitled, or I will force you to it."

"I defy you," replied the other, with a sneer.

"Liar and coward!" said Walter, striking him on the face.

"Mr. Maynard, you are too intemperate," cried Lord Alfred, snatching his arm; "what can justify such provocation?"

"Before I ring for my servants to show you to the door," said Sir George, "you will allow me to tell you, that I can only be insulted by my equal: I cannot go out with any but a gentleman!"

"I wonder," said Lord Alfred, interfering, "that you can dream of disputing Mr. Maynard's claim to be considered one. I can only say, so much do I value him, that let him satisfy me as to the quarrel, and I will attend him as second myself."

Walter gave him one eloquent look of gratitude, and Sir George turned livid with rage.

"But little explanation will suffice," said Maynard. "Sir George has, by he knows what false representations, induced me to write letters—love-letters for him. I believed that I only gave expression to real feeling—a feeling that I at once regretted and pitied. Instead of that, the passion which he feigned to me, as well as to its object, was a mere deceit, a matter of miserable and vain-glorious boasting. He could place the touching and beautiful letters, full of the most confiding love and the bitterest self-reproaches, in the hands of his mistress, to be tossed about for any chance eye! I have restored the letters to one who was the beloved child of my oldest and kindest friend!"

"Mr. Maynard, I shall be happy to accompany you," said Lord Alfred. "Sir George, what friend shall I communicate with?"

"With none: I will not," said Kingston, doggedly, "meet a moon-struck maniac!—a nobody!—a low-born beggar!"

"Leave out the epithet," returned Maynard, "and I am not ashamed of being the last. Sir George Kingston, my father served with yours, and he was a superior officer. His death-wound was received while defending his friend, Sir Edmund Kingston."

"I see I must give you the lesson myself that I meant you should have received from my servants," replied Sir George, with an insolent laugh. "There is no time like the present for these sort of things: Shelbourne," said he to a gentleman, who entered at that moment, you must take a little exercise before supper. Mr. Maynard has suddenly set up for a squire of dames. His romances have got up into his head, and he needs bleeding; so come with me. The park is lonely enough just now, and we can return to supper."

CHAPTER L.

THE DUEL.

The moonlight falleth lovely over earth;
And strange indeed must be the mind of man
That can resist its beautiful reproach.
How can hate work like fever in the soul
With such entire tranquillity around?
Evil must be our nature to refuse
Such gentle intercession.

The garden of Sir George Kingston communicated with the park; and through it the four gentlemen passed, brushing the dew from the drooping roses as they went. The night was singularly lovely:

"Such and so beautiful was that fair night,
It might have calmed the gay amid their mirth,
And given the wretched a delight in tears;"

but it had no soothing influence over human anger. Not an eye rested on the moon, whose sad, spiritual light had so little in common with the world on which it looks.

None listened to the low, soft music in the trees, every leaf of which, instinct with separate harmony, was like a soft note on a mysterious lyre. None of the four spoke till they arrived at a space open to the moonlight, but yet sheltered by the elms. There was little chance of being overlooked or interrupted. The park was locked: there was no entrance unless from the gardens of the houses; and from the houses themselves they were at a distance, besides having the elms between them.

"I will allow you to beg pardon even now," said Sir George, insolently.

Walter made no reply but by withdrawing his sword from the sheath; and in a few moments the seconds had placed them, and stood to see fair play.

I can understand the feeling of the duellist when really fierce and bitter—there are injuries only to be washed out in blood; but I have always thought, that the seconds must, or ought, to feel very uncomfortable. They stand by in cold blood to watch the glittering steel, whose shimmer may every moment be quenched in blood. If the eye be dropped for an instant, the

next it may look on death, and death in its most fearful shape,—one human being dying by the rage, the evil passion, or the unforgivable fault of another.

The suspense in the present instance was of short duration. Maynard was no match for Sir George. The clicking of the swords smote on the silent night, the moonlight glanced from the blade ere it reached the dewy grass; but, ere a bird disturbed from its roost was out of sight in the air; Walter had fallen; and the grass, silvery with dew and moonlight, ran red with human blood,

"Will you beg my pardon!" said Sir George, setting his foot on the body of his prostrate enemy.

Walter could only look denial and defiance; and Sir George had raised his arm to plunge his sword again through the enemy at his feet, when a female figure darted from behind one of the trees, and arrested his arm.

The surprise gave Walter time to spring up: he did so, but staggered with weakness, and leant for support against one of the elms. Still Kingston called upon him to take up his sword; but Lord Alfred interfered.

"It would be murder in cold blood; I will not stand by and witness it. One of you, at all events, has had enough:" and he went to Maynard, who leant, pale and faint, with the blood slowly welling from his side. "It is not much, however," said the kind-hearted young nobleman, as he stanched the wound with his handkerchief.

Lavinia, for she was the intruder, had watched the whole proceeding; her keen eye was for an instant softened with anxiety; but whatever might be the feelings which were passing through her mind, she showed no outward sign. If she was pale, it was hidden by her rouge; and her lip curled with its usual careless smile.

"And what the d—l brought you here?" cried Sir George Kingston.

"What the d—l brought you?" replied she, mimicking his manner.

"Well," said he, "I suppose I must excuse it, on account of the devotion it shows to myself."

"It shows no such thing," answered she, with the most provoking carelessness. "It was sheer curiosity brought me here—a few hints from actual life are always useful in my profession; and I wanted to see a real duel."

"I hope you are satisfied," said Sir George; "and now, I

suppose, you will return with myself and Mr. Shelburne to supper."

"You are wrong in all your suppositions to-night," replied she: "I am going away at once; the coach is waiting for me now. I was coming down stairs to get into it, when I saw you all hurrying off—I guessed the cause, and thought I might as well see you fight."

"Who has a coach waiting?" asked Alfred, this being the only part of the dialogue which had caught his attention. "Will they let it set down Mr. Maynard at the inn where he tells me he was to sleep."

"Oh, certainly," replied the actress, "provided he will promise not to die on the way."

"Madam!" exclaimed Sir George, almost breathless with anger, "I insist upon knowing the cause of your extraordinary conduct!"

"Extraordinary, do you call it?" returned she, with a look of comic surprise. "There is nothing extraordinary in any one's getting tired of you; and I am very tired indeed."

"Impertinent fool!" muttered Kingston, between his clenched teeth, feeling the more enraged because he saw Shelburne could scarcely repress his laughing.

"Why, Sir George!" continued she, taking an air of arch simplicity, and looking very pretty, "one would think no one had ever tired of you before; and yet you must have found it a very common occurrence. You are neither amusing nor interesting: how can you wonder that women find you very tiresome?"

Lavinia knew the object of her sarcasm well,—

> "———She was wreaking
> More revenge in bitter speaking"

than any thing else could have done. A woman's tears would have been to him a triumph: her reproaches would, at the very worst, only have bored him; but a sneer touched Achilles on the heel. He shrank from being ridiculed; he knew he had no ready wit to turn it.

"Do let us go home," exclaimed he, turning emphatically to his companion.

"It is so late that I must wish you 'good night!'" replied Mr. Shelburne, who, late as it was, secretly did not despair of finding some one to whom he could tell the adventure in which he had so suddenly found himself engaged. Why, it was

worth while sitting up all night, if it were only to narrate Sir George's unceremonious dismissal by the pretty actress.

"Surely," said Lavinia, extending her hand, "you have too much gallantry, Mr. Shelburne, not to put me into the coach."

Lord Alfred and Maynard were already nearly out of sight; of course, Mr. Shelburne could only take the hand offered, and not sorry so to do, as he hoped to hear a little more.

"Oh," said Sir George, "I see that I am to congratulate Mr. Shelburne on being my successor."

"No such thing," replied Lavinia; "I never allow my peace of mind to run any risk, which it would do with Mr. Shelburne after yourself—the contrast would be too dangerous."

CHAPTER LI.

THE ASSIGNATION.

God, in thy mercy, keep us with thy hand!
Dark are the thoughts that strive within the heart,
When evil passions rise like sudden storms,
Fearful and fierce! Let us not act those thoughts:
Leave not our course to our unguided will.
Left to ourselves, all crime is possible,
And those who seemed the most removed from guilt,
Have sunk the deepest!

Sir George bore the annoyances of the night as a very vain man does totally unaccustomed to mortification. He was frantic with passion; he longed to kill somebody, but he did not know who. He took a common resource in such cases—he stormed at his servants; but, on entering the house, consolation awaited him. A parcel was placed in his hands, which had been left with most particular directions that it should be given to him immediately. He was half-inclined, from pettish obstinacy, not to open it; but curiosity pervaded; and curiosity, like virtue, was its own reward.

It contained a key, and a note from Lady Marchmont, entreating him to forgive what she called her petulance that evening at the *fête;* and bidding him come to tell her that she was still loved. He was to enter through the little garden gate, and, ascending by the balcony steps, would, in five moments, reach the dressing-room, where he would find her alone.

There was a postscript—"By the by, a secretary of yours has made a great merit of giving me the letters I wrote to you: of course he stole them; we must concert some means of securing his silence."

"So I owe her submission half to fear—a useful lesson as regards women in future. I believe there is nothing like making them afraid of you; but," continued he, his handsome face darkening with every evil passion, "it adds to my triumph to think that I owe it to the very means that fool took to prevent it! I will take care that he knows it."

Sir George could understand no other motive for Maynard's conduct than his liking Lady Marchmont himself—a higher or more generous cause never even suggested itself.

"I must attend to my toilet a little; but, no," added he, "the very carelessness will be a proof of haste; and, now I think of it, I am very late:" so saying, he threw his cloak round him, and hurried across the park.

Lady Marchmont had passed another hour of miserable suspense. The moonlight was waxing cold and faint, and the chill air of morning began to rustle among the trees; and the mist, which rose from the dewy grass, spread like a thin veil, rendering all distant objects confused. A streak of wan and sickly light began to glimmer in the east; and again Lady Marchmont clenched her hands together, and asked,—"Will he come?"

The cold wind lifted her long hair from her neck; but she felt it not. Suddenly she started; she pressed her hands to her burning eye-lids to clear their sight: but—no; she was not deceived: a figure, as yet indistinct as a shadow, was hurrying across the park. The color deepened on her cheek, the light flashed from her eyes; but neither color nor light were such as are wont to welcome the expected lover's arrival.

"He must not find me waiting on the balcony," whispered she, with a mechanical consciousness of feminine pride; "yet, what does it matter?" added she, with a bitter laugh.

However, she again resumed her seat in the arm-chair, and busied herself about a lamp, over which some coffee was boiling. She looked very different now to what she had done while seated on that very chair when Maynard came.

She had taken off her velvet robe, and was carelessly wrapped in a white silk night-gown, fastened with violet ribands. It was one she had worn in half-mourning, and had all the coquettish elegance of *demie parure*. The serpent was unbound from her hair, which was partly gathered up with a violet band—part left loose on her shoulders, as if she had stopped in the middle of her graceful task. She was pale no longer, her cheek burned with the clear feverish red of the pomegranate, and gave that peculiar light to the eyes, which is only given by the contrast of the crimson. Deep as it was, it grew yet deeper; for Sir George Kingston entered the room.

"Thus, let me thank you! thus, pour out my happiness!" exclaimed he, throwing himself at her feet.

She averted her face, but that was only natural timidity.

"Ah!" cried she, suddenly, "your cloak is quite wet with morning dew; you are a laggard, Sir George!"

"I have not had your note half-an-hour," replied he; "I flew to you the moment I received it."

"I fancy," said she, with a smile, "that we are both a little tired; you must have a cup of coffee with me before we begin to talk."

Sir George saw that she was embarrassed, and secretly enjoyed it.

"You will not let me pour out the coffee," said she, withdrawing her hand; "there, tell me if my picture is like me."

He rose, and the instant his back turned, she empted into his cup the contents of a little phial, that she took with the rapidity of thought, from the folds of her dress.

"I cannot look at a picture," exclaimed he, "while I can gaze on the original."

"Well," replied she, "your coffee is now ready."

He took the cup and drank it down—glad of it; for having to play the part of an ardent lover, he felt more sleepy than was quite suiting to the character. The coffee revived him; and snatching Lady Marchmont's beautiful hand, he pressed it to his lips. "How can I ever," whispered he, drawing nearer towards her, "ever thank you enough?"

"I do not know," said Henrietta, starting from her seat, and drawing herself to her full height, "that you have much to thank me for; but, follow me softly."

She took the lamp, and led the way through a suite of apartments, till she stopped in a large bed-room, dimly lighted by a night-lamp, and the one she carried.

"This is the third time that I have been here to-night," muttered she; and, hastily withdrawing the heavy curtain, exclaimed,—"Look there!"

Sir George did look, and saw the face of Lord Marchmont; and saw too that it was the face of a corpse.

"We cannot stay here," continued she, in the same hollow whisper, and led the way back again to the dressing-room.

Sir George followed her mechanically; one look at the bed of death was enough; the pale, rigid countenance, startled him like a spectre.

"I would not have come," was the first thought that rose in his mind, "if I had had the least idea of such a scene. How unlucky Lord Marchmont should have died to-night!"

The countess led the way through the noiseless rooms with a step so cautious, that it did not waken the slightest echo, and her companion was as careful as herself. They regained the

apartment without interruption; and, after closing the door quietly, Lady Marchmont set the lamp down on the table. Its faint gleam, almost quenched by the day-light, fell upon her face, and her companion started at its strange and fearful expression!

"Lord Marchmont," said Henrietta, "overheard our conversation this evening. To-morrow he would have denounced and degraded me; to-night he has died, and by my hand!"

Sir George made an involuntary step nearer to the window—the selfish ever the predominant feeling.

"You cannot suppose," exclaimed he, "that I would marry his widow!—his murderer!"

Henrietta gazed upon him, with the fire flashing from her large black eyes.

"And what do you suppose I sent to you for?"

Sir George stood silent, and she rapidly continued:—

"I sent for you that I might know the sweetness of revenge; that I might tell you how I scorned, how I loathed you! Do you think that I am not perfectly aware of the mean treachery of your conduct?"

"Maynard is"—faltered Sir George Kingston.

"What you are not—a person in whom belief may be placed. Now I understand the contrast between yourself and your letters. But it is of no use talking now; the servants will soon be stirring, and it would be rather awkward to be found here."

"For you, perhaps, madam," sneered Sir George.

"Rather for yourself," replied she, with the greatest composure; "you might be implicated in the charge of murder."

Sir George hastily approached the balcony; and Lady Marchmont said, "while in her eye the gladiator broke," so fierce even was the expression of her beautiful face,—"I do not think that Sir George Kingston will boast to-morrow of his interview with me to-night."

He hurried down the steps, and a wild hysterical laugh rang after him. There was something in the sound that startled even the careless and hardened Sir George Kingston. Still, before he got half way across the park, vanity again floated on the surface.

"What a pity," muttered he, "that I shall not be able to tell to-night's *tête-à-tête!* She has taken good care to prevent it."

She had taken more care than he suspected. Even while he spoke a fiery pain darted, like a bird of prey, on his heart; he gasped for breath; and when the agony was over, felt utterly ex-

hausted. He staggered for support against a tree near. By a strange coincidence, it was the very one against which Walter Maynard had leant not above an hour or so before. The blood was yet red on the grass; and Sir George Kingston felt a sickness seize upon him as he caught sight of it.

Again his whole frame was wrung with convulsive pain; this time the spasm was instantly followed by another. He strove to call for aid; and he heard his voice die away on the silent night. He was alone—helpless; a few acres of green grass made a solitude, vast as a desert, around him. Every moment he grew more incapable of moving: yet he knew he might cry aloud for assistance in vain. He gazed around—strange shapes seemed to flit by, then grow into gigantic shadows; a sound of rushing waters was in his ears, and he gasped with a burning thirst.

Suddenly a terrible fear flashed across him, and as it flashed, he felt that it was the truth. The cup of coffee that he had drank at Lady Marchmont's, had she drugged that too? Lord Marchmont's white, rigid face seemed to be painted distinctly on the air; and then endowed with a strange consciousness, opened its dull eyes; and Sir George felt that his doom was sealed in that look. The suffering grew more acute; his knees failed under him, and he sank heavily on the ground.

Still life was strong within him; he struggled with his agony; he thought if he could but reach home he might have aid, and live; but, even while he struggled, there was that within which told him his struggles were vain. He was growing delirious with the internal torture, with the intolerable burning thirst; yet his delirium turned upon real objects; the pleasures of existence crowded upon his imagination—he saw his youth, as it were, distinct before him; he thought of his wealth, it could not now buy him even a cup of cold water: then beautiful forms, but all with fiendish eyes, gathered round him; some offered him golden fruits; others, purple wine: he stretched his parched mouth towards them, and they melted into the wan air with a mocking laugh.

Consciousness returned again; he saw the first red of the morning beginning to color the clouds; a sort of stupid wonder passed through him, that he had never thought them so lovely before. He strove to keep his heavy eye-lids open, to fix them on the blue sky; he felt that if once they closed, never would they open again.

At that moment, a bird fluttered from the bough overhead, and

sprang with a song, into the air. A gleam of sun-shine broke forth, as if to light its early path. Sir George moaned aloud in envy; he would have been thankful to be that poor bird. That song was the signal for a thousand others; every bough grew in a moment alive; the sunshine became more golden, and a rich purple flushed deepening every instant in the east.

Again a fierce spasm shook Sir George's now weakened frame; it forced from him a womanish shriek; he was glad to hear it: a wild hope came, that it might bring some chance wanderer to his help; and, in that hope, he filled the air with frantic cries.

He cried in vain; he was dying in the midst of that crowded city, helpless, and alone. Oh, for a human face to have bent over his own! He ceased his shrieks suddenly, he found that he exhausted his strength; the morning had now broken, and if he could but live a little longer, some one must pass; and, so strong was the craving for humanity, that it was as if, let any one come near, and he must be saved. But the cold dews rose heavily on his forehead, a feeling of suffocation was in his throat, while his eyes swam, and the objects near began to whirl round with frightful velocity.

He raised his hand to clear the mists from his sight, but his strength failed in the effort, and his hand dropped heavily to the ground with a noise that, to his own ear, sounded like thunder! Painfully, he forced his hot eyelids to unclose, and his distended orbs sought for some object where on to fix; they met the patch of grass, yet red with the blood of Walter Maynard. It seemed to rise in judgment against him; he could not take his eyes away from the guilty color which began to spread; it rose coloring the heavens with its fearful hue, till the very azure was died with scarlet. Then it grew dark; a darkness filled with shadows—shadows from other years.

Every evil thought that had ever arisen within him, now assumed some palpable form. Pale faces looked upon him, with sad reproaches; wasted hours, misused gifts, stood around like spectres. For the first time in his indulged and evil life, he thought of judgment and of an hereafter. He remembered his God, but only to fear him. He started! that awful terror mastered even the extremity of pain; the drops poured down his face; his eyes glared fearfully round, seeking shelter and finding none. The effort was too much; he sank back with one last cry of despair, and in that despair he died!

The birds sang gaily over head; the morning sun dried up even the tears that night had left on the leaves. The clouds

first reddened, and then wandered, white and pure, over the sky; voices rose from the wilderness of streets around, and another day came, busy and anxious, to awakening humanity. The cheerfulness of the morning brought its own glad tone to the spirits of the early walkers in the park. The first that entered were going on their way with a song, when the singing voice suddenly changed to a cry of horror, for the dead lay before their feet. His eyes, wild and staring—there had been no friendly hand to close them; his features convulsed with fearful agony. Sir George Kingston was stretched a corpse! He—the rich, the luxurious, the flattered—had died by the common pathway like a dog!

CHAPTER LII.

THE CHAMBER OF DEATH.

> Ah! sad it is to see the deck
> Dismasted of some noble wreck;
> And sad to see the marble stone
> Defaced, and with gray moss o'ergrown;
> And sad to see the broken lute
> For ever to its music mute.
> But what is lute, or fallen tower,
> Or ship sunk in its proudest hour,
> To awe and majesty combined
> In their worst shape—the ruined mind?

The morning air waved to and fro the chintz curtains of a large, and, for a London one, a very cheerful-looking room, whose windows opened to the Thames. It was high tide, and every wave seemed freighted with a separate sunbeam; the sails of the small boats, as they darted rapidly along, shone with the purest white; and those that rowed past, flung up a shower of glittering sparkles at every stroke of the oar. On the sill of each window were placed pots, full of roses; and their sweet breath floated into the room.

In a large arm-chair, so placed as to command every thing that went by, the view only broken by the waving leaves of the rose-trees, sat Mrs. Churchill. On one side was an embroidery-frame, which, from the delicate finish of the wreath, indicated that younger eyes occasionally aided the old lady. On the other was a small table, with an exquisite breakfast-service of Dresden china, from which she was sipping her chocolate. Placed opposite, on a low seat, was her grand-daughter, a huge book propped on her knee, from which she was reading aloud. Perhaps there was a charm in that sweet voice, which gave its own unconscious fascination to the long-drawn pages; but there was, also, the still stronger charm of habit.

Mrs. Churchill liked the interminable labyrinths of the Cyrus and the Cassandra, because she had liked them in the days of her girlhood. Youth identifies itself with the romance; it is the heroic knight, or the lovely lady, of which it reads; it lives amid those fine creations; its sweetest hours are given to dreams which soon

> "Fade into the light of common day."

It would have seemed ludicrous to a common observer to mark the aged woman listening by the hour to these high-flown gallantries; but it was not them that she heard, it was the remembrances that they brought. The old live more with memory than the young. Every page in that ponderous tome had some association with life's brightest hours: she lived them over again, while the murmur of that fair girl's soft tones fell sweet upon her ear. Ethel's graceful figure, seated at her grandmother's feet, completed the picture; and any one who had looked casually into that cool and cheerful chamber, would have thought it a very shrine of household happiness. And Ethel, if not happy, was calm—almost content; every day brought its duties, sweetened by affection; and, in her grandmother's comfort she found her own.

Mrs. Churchill had given up urging Ethel into a round of gaiety, which suited neither her health nor her spirits. She could not but feel the tender care that watched her least look, yet was always as submissive as it was anxious. She had been a long time in discovering that Ethel was no longer a child; but she now softened down a thousand prejudices by daily counsel with one who was a gentle and intelligent companion. Ethel resolutely turned her thoughts from the past; and, if she could not look to the future, at least she forced them to occupy themselves with the present. The bitterness of a first great despair had passed; but the traces would linger, despite every effort. Her step was no longer buoyant, and her laugh was no longer heard rising suddenly, like the notes of a bird; she had a look of weariness when she tried any of her old amusements. Unless at her grandmother's request, she never went near the spinet; she nursed no flowers for her own room; and when she read, it was slowly; she could not keep her attention to the page. You gazed on her, and saw

> "'Twas a pale face that seemed undoubtedly
> As if a blooming face it ought to be!"

But the bloom and the gaiety had gone together: there was sweetness and endurance; but they are sad, when the only expression worn by youth.

She was just pausing for breath after a longer speech, even than usual, of the heroine's, when the door opened, and Madame Cecile, Lady Marchmont's maid, rushed into the room.

"Oh, my lady!" exclaimed she; "for pity's sake come to

her, Miss Churchill!" and, sinking into a chair gave way to a violent burst of hysterics.

It was long before Ethel's soothing or questions could extract any thing like an answer, till Mrs. Churchill took the matter into her own hands, and tried the effect of a little judicious scolding. The effect was most salutary; and, amid starts and screams—for the poor girl was fairly frightened out of the small portion of sense that, at any time, belonged to her—they learned that Lord Marchmont had been found dead in his bed; and that Lady Marchmont was, with the shock, in a state of almost insanity!

"We can do nothing with her! she won't even let me put up her hair under her cap!" said Madame Cecile.

Ethel wrung her hands in dismay, but instantly recovering, exclaimed, "Oh, let me go to her at once! may I not, dear madam?"

Mrs. Churchill gave consent without hesitation; and a chair being sent for immediately, Ethel hurried as fast as she could to Marchmont House. All was in that confusion which follows any sudden calamity: the servants were hurrying in all directions, apparently for no other purpose than that of getting in each other's way. As she went up stairs, a succession of frightful screams made her hurry breathlessly to the room from whence they came. It was Lady Marchmont's dressing-room; and there she found her surrounded by physicians, two of whom held her: while the surgeon made a vain attempt to bleed her: it was impossible in her present state.

Ethel stood—pity, anxiety—alike merged in astonishment at the change which a single night had wrought. Henrietta's long hair flowed unbound, but it was white as the shoulders over which it swept. Age and youth seemed to have met together: there was the skin, fair and smooth, but the mouth was fallen, and the features thin and contracted. The large black eyes seemed to have gone back into the head, and a dark hollow circle was round them; while the change in the color of the hair, once so glossily black, now turned to silver, gave her countenance something that seemed to Ethel almost supernatural. As soon as Henrietta saw her, with a sudden spring she released herself from restraint: and, flinging her arms round her friend, though it was obvious she did not know her, exclaimed,—

"Ah! you look gentle, I will go with you; save me from these horrible men, who want to drag me to prison!"

But while speaking, her hands relaxed their passionate cling-

ing; the wild black eyes closed heavily, and she sank fainting on the floor

"It is a merciful insensibility," said the eldest physician; "but, if she revive, I fear the awakening—it will be terrible!"

"I will watch by her," cried Ethel; and, for many, many long and dreadful nights did she watch by her bed-side; even to herself she would not guess what might be the import of those frightful ravings!

Fearful were the lessons that the young and gentle Ethel learnt in the house of mourning. She saw Lord Marchmont borne away to his grave, unfollowed by a single regret, and forgotten as soon as the coffin was closed. The selfish man left behind him neither sorrow nor affection; he was summoned away, and his place knew him no more. But the bed-side of Lady Marchmont had a darker lesson than the grave, the ravings of insanity revealed the fiery world of that beating and passionate heart. Ethel could only feel too fearful, too humbled, for judgment; but she wept even while she prayed, beside her early friend.

CHAPTER LIII.

POVERTY.

It is an awful thing how we forget
The sacred ties that bind us each to each.
Our pleasures might admonish us, and say,
Tremble at that delight which is unshared;
Its selfishness must be its punishment.
All have their sorrows, and how strange it seems
They do not soften more the general heart:
Sorrows should be those universal links
That draw all life together.

"It is of no use asking me to stay," said Lavinia to the manager: "you know that I never do any thing but what I choose!"

"You need not tell me that," interrupted the other; "but, if you had any sense, you would choose to do what I ask. I have promised the Duke of Bolton, that you should sup with us to-night."

"I would not come," replied the actress, "if it were only to teach you not to make promises for me; but I cannot waste any more time talking to you!"

"His grace will go frantic with disappointment!" continued the manager; "that last ballad of yours completely turned his head? Indeed, if you would but play your cards properly, there is no saying what might happen!"

"Well," cried she, "since you have so brilliant an idea of my future prospects, perhaps you will, on the strength of them, advance me another week's salary!"

"Indeed I will not!" replied her companion; "you are already more in advance than I ever before allowed any of my company to be; and, as to your prospects, why you are throwing them away!"

"Well, well, it does not matter, and I won't keep you from supper. You may tell the duke, that we value things in proportion to the trouble that they give us, and that is the reason why I always give as much as I can!"

So saying, she hurried off; but the tears were in her eyes, and her hand trembled as it drew her cloak round her. She was soon in the dimly-lighted streets, made more dreary by a small

heavy rain that was falling. Life is full of strange contrasts; and who that could have seen—weary, yet walking as fast as she could, for she had a long way to go; faint, for of late she had debarred herself common necessaries; cold, for the rain soon pierced her thin cloak—who would have believed that she was the brilliant actress who, not an hour since, was the gaze of every eye, while the whole house rang with applause?

"Ah, there is still light!" muttered she, as she stopped before a shop, whose shutters were, however, closed; but through which came the glimmer from within. She paused for a moment on the threshold, as if reluctant to enter.

"The only memorial I shall soon have of him—his gift!" said she, in a low sad whisper; and then, with the haste of one who makes a sudden resolution, with which they are almost afraid to trust themselves, she rapped loudly at the door. There was a moment's silence, then whispering within, and a voice asked:—

"Who's there?"

"Oh!" replied Lavinia, "you know me very well; let me in, I have a locket you must take to-night, or you shall not have it to-morrow!"

It was a locket that Walter Maynard had given her immediately after her appearance in his comedy; one of the incidents turned upon a locket, and she had made, what is theatrically called, a hit in the scene. A heavy step approached the door; a sound was heard, as of a falling chain; then bolt after bolt was withdrawn, and at last the actress was admitted, and the door was instantly closed after her. It was a pawnbroker's shop, that last receptacle of human wretchedness—wretchedness that takes the most squalid and degrading form; over the door might be written Dante's "Lasciate Speranza!" for, truly, hope never enters there!

The various articles exhibited in the windows during the day, had been removed for greater security, and there only remained a blank. But the glass cases on the counter still sent forth a sort of dull glitter; they were filled with various ornaments, some pretty, though mostly tarnished by time, but each telling some little history of a happier hour. Still, this was the least oppressive portion of the establishment; ornaments, even though hallowed by affection, are vanities; and, though even vanity be reluctantly parted with, it is but a brief pang. I believe there is not a woman in the world that would hesitate to part

with the most costly toy in her possession, to save but an annoyance from the object she loved: but there were, collected together, evidence of far heavier sacrifices. There were cords passed along the ceiling, from whence hung articles of wearing apparel of the most common description, things that spoke of every-day use, and there was one whole line of little children's frocks; moreover, in one corner appeared, piled up, a large heap of blankets.

There is something fearfully wrong in what we call our highly civilized state of society, when poverty can be permitted to take the ghastly shapes of suffering that it does. It is enough, if we did but think, to make the heart sick, when we know the misery, the abject misery, which surrounds us in this vast city; and we might tremble to consider how much might be prevented —prevented both by individual and by general exertion. We are seated, perhaps leaning, in an easy chair, our feet on the fender, doing nothing or some light work, which is only an amusement; our meals have gratified not only hunger, but taste; we are under the pressure of not one single want; and yet, within a hundred yards from our door, there is a wretch dying of cold and hunger!

No one can deny the wide and ready benevolence which prevails in our country; but while the misery exists, that no one can deny does exist, there must be some want of either will or judgment. Too many people confound charity with donation; they are satisfied with having given the most ready vent to the generous impulse; they have gratified at once a high and a low feeling—the kindness and, I fear, also the ostentation. That is not charity which goes about with a white pocket handkerchief in the hand, and is followed by a flourish of trumpets! No, charity is a calm, severe duty; it must be intellectual, to be advantageous. It is a strange mistake that it should ever be considered a merit; its fulfilment is only what we owe to each other, and is a debt never paid to its full extent.

It is a most difficult art to give; for if, in giving, we also give the habit of dependence, our gift has been that of an evil spirit, which always proves fatal. What we should seek to give are, habits, not only of industry, but of prudence: to look forward, is the first great lesson of human improvement. In the assistance hitherto offered to those in need, the self-respect of the obliged has been too much forgotten: we have degraded, where we should have encouraged. The remedy lies with time, and with knowledge; but there must be much to redress in the so-

cial system, which has luxury at one extreme, and starvation at the other.

Lavinia approached the counter with her usual careless air; and, laying down the locket, named its price. There were two men in the shop—brothers, from their obvious likeness—sallow, with sharp features, to which no possible change could bring any other expression than a sort of dull cunning. The eyes were small, and of a dead filmy black; they said nothing, even when fixed upon you. One of the brothers never moved from the high desk at which he was seated. He gave one cautious glance at the visiter; and, after that, never looked from his paper. The other took the locket, examined it carefully, and laid it down, saying, in a voice that closely resembled the hissing of a snake,—

"You ask too much!"

"Nay," replied the actress, "it is worth far more!"

"We may keep it by us," replied the pawnbroker, "for months; there is no demand for such articles."

"But," exclaimed she, eagerly, "I shall soon redeem it!"

"So you all say," returned the man, with imperturbable coolness.

"Ah!" cried Lavinia, "I will answer for redeeming it in a month!"

"We hear the same story every day," was the answer.

"But I shall have plenty of money in a few weeks!" interrupted Lavinia.

"Then you will not care for your old ornaments: you will go and buy new!" replied the man.

The actress laughed out, with something of the recklessness that was part of her nature. The man looked up in dismay from his desk, the one behind the counter opened his small black eyes with a gaze of stupid wonder—laughter was there such an unfamiliar sound.

"Well," continued she, "there is a good deal of truth in what you say; so, what will you give me?"

The man named about a tithe of the value of the article; her countenance fell as she said, in a hollow whisper, "I suppose I must take it!"

The pawnbroker took the locket, carefully put it aside, slowly counted out the money, still more slowly filled up the small printed ticket, and then passed money and card into Lavinia's hand, to whose impatient temper the delay had seemed interminable. She hurried off, and the door was closed; and, bolt af-

ter bolt, drawn after her. The rain poured in torrents, and she was wet through before she arrived at the door of the small inn in the city, which was her destination.

"I must dry myself," said she, approaching the kitchen fire, "before I go into his room."

She took off her cloak, wrung the rain from her long and dripping hair; and, while doing so, caught sight of herself in the small piece of glass which, put like a slate into a wooden frame, hung on a nail.

"I have forgotten to wipe off my rouge," muttered she; "a pretty figure I look, with these read streaks!" she took her handkerchief and removed the stains, then you saw that the cheek was pale and hollow. She stood before the fire for some time, though every gesture betrayed her impatience. When the landlady came in, she called her, and placed in her hands a small sum of money. "This is last week's bill."

The woman half hesitated to take it, but she was very poor herself; as she took it she said, with great kindness, "I have been sitting with him, but he is very bad to-night!"

Lavinia started! "I am quite dry, the damp can do him no harm now;" so saying, she hurried up the narrow staircase to a small room, where, on a wretched bed, lay Walter Maynard!

There was the end of all his glorious fancies—of all his lofty aspirations. The poetry, which had so often made real life seem like a dream, had now reached its last dark close. Never more would the voice of the charmer, Hope, reach his ear, charm she never so wisely. Poor, neglected, and broken-hearted, Walter Maynard was dying.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE USUAL DESTINY OF THE IMAGINATION.

Remembrance makes the poet; 'tis the past
Lingering within him, with a keener sense
Than is upon the thoughts of common men,
Of what has been, that fills the actual world
With unreal likenesses of lovely shapes
That were, and are not; and the fairer they,
The more their contrast with existing things;
The more his power, the greater is his grief.
Are we then fallen from some noble star,
Whose consciousness is an unknown curse;
And we feel capable of happiness
Only to know it is not of our sphere!

THE first sickly gleam of daylight came in through the uncurtained window, deadening the dull yellow glare of the candle that, having burned through the night, was fast sinking in the socket. The chill and uncomfortable light showed the full wretchedness of the scene over which it fell; the walls were only whitewashed, the whiteness long since obscured by dust and smoke, and broken away in many places. The bare boards looked as if they had not been scoured for months; and a deal table, and two rickety chairs, were all the furniture, except the miserable pallet on which Walter Maynard lay dying; and this was the end of his impassioned hopes, and of his early and glorious dreams!

The change that a few weeks had wrought in him was awful: the features were almost transparent, and with a strange beauty, like a spirit's; and yet with that look which belongs to death, and death only. He was awake, feverish, and restless; and the clear, shining eyes had that sort of fixed brilliancy, which life, even in its brightest moments, never gave. The door opened so softly, that even he did not hear it. Lavinia looked in; and, seeing that he was already roused, entered with his coffee; it was the only thing for which he retained the slightest liking; perhaps there was some lingering association with the pursuits once so precious; the haunted midnights, when he had been accustomed to drink it.

"How have you slept?" said she.

Walter smiled faintly, but his reply was interrupted by coughing; he signed to the window, which she opened, and then turned hastily away, for she could not bear the sight of the

churchyard below. Maynard was now in the same house where he had come by chance on his first arrival in London; he was now occupying the room above the very one where he then slept. Remembering it as a cheap, out-of-the-way place, he had come thither the day after the duel to die, uncared for and unknown. But Lavinia had found him out; and for weeks had been his devoted nurse, though even she was startled at the extreme destitution of their situation; but, for his sake only, not for her own.

"Oh, Walter!" exclaimed she, after a long silence, during which she had either watched his difficult breathing, or turned aside to dash away the tears that in spite of herself would fill her eyes. There is an awe about death, even in the face the most familiar to us; it has already taken its likeness from the hereafter, so dreadful and so dark. "I cannot bear to see you perishing thus; you have many friends, do let me apply to them?"

"Friends!" answered Walter, bitterly, "I have no friends. While I could work for them, or amuse them, they were glad enough to flatter and caress me; now that I am broken in health and spirits, that my soul has worn itself out in their service, who of all that have owed pleasant hours to my pages will care that the hand which wrote now lies languid, scarcely able to trace its own name!"

"Do not talk thus," said she.

"Why not?" interrupted Walter, "it is the truth. I loathe, I despise my kind; I grieve over the labor that I have wasted on them. I should regret every generous hope, every lofty emotion, did I not think they must rise up in bitter mockery against them."

Lavinia looked bewildered; she could as little understand this outburst of impassioned anger, as she understood his former bursts of hopeful enthusiasm. She knew nothing of the irritability inseparable from an imaginative temperament; feeling every thing with the keenest susceptibility, and exaggerating every thing. The excitement of even those few words was too much, he sank back, fainting, on his pillow. It soon, however, passed away, and he roused again.

"Lavinia!" exclaimed he hastily, "there are some people sent into the world to be miserable; and miserably do they fulfil their fate. If you see one eager, hopeful, and believing, who holds the suffering of his kind his noblest reward—over whom even the words of those whom he despises have influence—be assured that you see one predestined to the most utter wretchedness."

"I am sure," returned Lavinia, not knowing very well what to say, "it is never worth while caring much about other people."

"How wretched," continued Walter, "has my whole life been! I look back upon my sad and unloved childhood, when I felt the unkind and cold word with a sorrow beyond my years. Then came a youth of incessant labor—labor whose exhaustion none can tell but those engaged in it. How often has the pen dropped from my hand for very weariness, and the characters swam before my aching sight! How often have I written when heart-sick, forcing my imagination, till the re-action was terrible!"

"Dearest Walter, do not talk, you are not equal to it," interrupted his companion.

"Oh, no; it does me good. I cannot bear," returned he, "to be here thinking over thoughts that fret my very life away. Alas! how I grieve over all that was yet stored in my mind! Do you know, Lavinia," continued he, with all the eagerness of a slight delirium, "I am far cleverer than I was; I have felt, have thought so much! Talk of the mind exhausting itself!—never! Think of the mass of material which every day accumulates! Then experience, with its calm, clear light, corrects so many youthful fallacies; every day we feel our higher moral responsibility, and our greater power. What beautiful creations even now rush over me!—but, no, no!—I am dying!—I shall write no more!" and his voice sunk, as he gasped for breath: "and she," murmured he, after a long pause, "whom I have so idolized—a thousand hearts beat at the tender sorrow of which she was the inspiration! yet she will never know how utterly she has been beloved. Even now her sweet face swims before me; methinks that I would give worlds to gaze upon it once again; to carry the image into eternity with me!"

A peculiar expression crossed Lavinia's face and she rose from her seat; her movement recalled Walter from his temporary abstraction.

"You are not going yet?" asked he; for now he clung, like a sick child, to the presence of his kind attendant.

"I am going," replied she, "earlier to-day, that I may come back the sooner; the rehearsal will be very short; and now, dear Walter, try and compose yourself."

"You are very, very kind," said he, in broken accents; and after placing water and a restorative medicine near him; the actress left the room. She left the chamber of death and of desolation, to rehearse the jests of a comedy.

CHAPTER LV.

A REQUEST.

Trace the young poet's fate
Fresh from his solitude—the child of dreams,
His heart upon his lip, he seeks the world
To find him fame and fortune, as if life
Were like a fairy tale. His song has led
The way before him; flatteries fill his ear,
And he seems happy in so many friends.
What marvel if he somewhat overrate
His talents and his state!

"She sleeps now heavily, nor will she waken for some hours; every thing depends upon that awakening," said the physician.

"You have, then, hopes?" asked Ethel.

"That the body," replied the other, "may recover; but not the mind. Young lady, it would be wrong to deceive you; Lady Marchmont is, I fear, irrecoverably insane."

She leaned against the bed, pale, sick with the shock of his words; yet mingled with a strange and fearful relief. Insanity, with no further cause, would account for Henrietta's frantic ravings; and when she thought how gifted, how clever she was, it seemed impossible that such a mind could pass away in a single night. She hoped; she could not help hoping.

When the physician went away, she approached the bed, and gazed upon Henrietta sleeping. How wan, and how attenuated was that beautiful face! the cheek fell in with a complete hollow; and the black eye-lashes, as they rested upon it, only served to show still more forcibly, its deadly whiteness.

She had been restless at first; and some of the silvery gray hair fell over the forehead. Ethel put it softly back, and started to feel how the hot pulses throbbed beneath her touch. She carefully drew the curtains; and, leaving orders to be sent for should there be the slightest change, returned home.

It was a great relief to her oppressed spirits to find that her grandmother had an old friend come to pass the day with her, so the Cassandra was left in repose for that morning at least. She sought the little chamber peculiarly appropriated to her own

use; and, seating herself by the window, sank into a sad and listless reverie.

It is a mood whose "profitless dejection" there are few among us but what have known. It is the result of the over-strained nerves, the worn-out frame—something of bodily weakness must mingle with it. We turn away from the future, we are too desponding to look forward. Every sorrow of the past seems to rise up, not only as a recollection of suffering, but as if each were an omen of what is to come. We feel as if even to wish were a folly; or, worse, a tempting of fate. We have no confidence in our own good fortune; it seems as if the mere fact of wishing were enough to have that wish denied. A fretful discontent gnaws at the heart, the worse for being ashamed to confess it.

But Ethel soon felt the error of giving way to this utter discouragement: she made it a duty to struggle against it. She rose from her seat; and, flinging open the casement, strove to divert her attention by looking out upon the river. She turned hastily away; she had no sympathy with the sunshine—the movement—the seeming cheerfulness of the world below. She took up her work, but that was no mental stimulus; she laid it down, and, going to her little bookcase, took down the first book that came to hand.

It was a favorite volume which she opened—"Fugitive Poems, by Walter Maynard." She had always taken an interest in one whom she had known from earliest childhood; and of late the melancholy in herself had harmonized with that which was the chief characteristic of his writings. She soon became interested: her sadness took a softer tone; for now it seemed understood, and met with tender pity. And this is the dearest privilege of the poet—to soothe the sorrowing, and to excite the languid hour; to renovate exhausted nature, by awakening it with the spiritual and the elevated; and bringing around our common hours shadows from those more divine.

Ethel was, however, interrupted by the appearance of her maid bringing her chocolate, and a message that a young person below was very anxious to see her.

"Show her up immediately," was Miss Churchill's reply, who was, however, a little startled when she found that her visiter was her former attendant, Lavinia Fenton. But her first glance at the young actress was enough; she was pale, thin, and the traces of tears were yet recent on her cheeks. She had been very wrong to leave her mistress as she had done; and to Ethel's

quiet and secluded habits her having gone on the stage seemed absolutely awful; but she was obviously suffering; and the only question was, how that suffering could be assisted?

Ethel approached her kindly, and made her sit down and take some refreshment, before she would even ask her what was her present business.

"I do not come on my own account," exclaimed Lavinia, eagerly: "believe me, Miss Churchill, I remember all your former kindness, and know too well the difference between us, not to know the best way I can mark my sense of it is never to come near you."

"Oh, Lavinia!" exclaimed her young mistress; "how could you leave us? we used to be so fond of each other! surely I shall be able to prevail upon you to leave your present mode of life. Tell me, what can we do for you?"

"Nothing," said the girl, touched to the very heart by Ethel's kindness; "I could not come to you if I had been starving in the streets. Now I do not come for myself."

"On whose account, then!" exclaimed her listener.

Lavinia hesitated, she had persuaded herself into her visit; the whole way she had invented speeches, she had quite settled how to meet any possible objection; but now her voice failed her, her frame shook with strong emotion, and it was some moments before she could reply.

"Ah, madam! I wish you could have witnessed the scene which I have just left. I am come from the death-bed, in hopes that you will grant the last earthly wish which seems to haunt it."

"Could you doubt one moment that I should?" interrupted Ethel: "only tell me what it is?"

"Do you remember," asked the actress, "Walter Maynard?"

"Do I remember him!" exclaimed Ethel, her eye unconsciously falling on the volume which she had just been reading, and which still lay open on the table,—"It would, indeed, be difficult to forget him."

The quick glance of the actress followed her look. "Ah!" said she, "you have been reading his works: he will write no more beautiful verses to you; for he is dying—dying, too, in miserable want!"

"Indeed!" cried Ethel, springing from her seat, "let us go to him!—what can we do? Let me find my grandmother!"

Lavinia gently detained her. "Walter Maynard," continued she, "is far beyond all human help; his days—ay, his very

hours—are numbered: but you may fling over them one last gleam of human happiness."

"I!" cried Ethel.

"You—you whom he has loved so long, so truly! you saw it not, you thought only of another; but Walter Maynard loved your very shadow; and such have you been to him through life."

Ethel stood breathless with surprise; she looked back to Walter with the affectionate regard which lingers around one whom we have known in early life, and have never seen since. Of late, her imagination had dwelt upon him with that picturesque interest with which we are apt to invest the writer whose pages appeal to our feelings.

Lavinia saw her emotion, and added, "Not that your name ever passed his lips; save in the muttered wish of this morning, he never spoke of you. If you could see him now—so changed, so pale—you would pity him."

"Pity him!" exclaimed Ethel, no longer able to suppress her tears.

"You will come, then?" asked the actress.

"Yes, the instant I have spoken to my grandmother;" and, ringing the bell, desired that her chair might be sent round immediately.

"It is a long way off," said Lavinia, "and I must hurry away. I always dread what may have happened during my absence."

"Is he so very ill?" interrupted Ethel.

"Lady, he is dying," replied the other. Then, laying the address, with written directions, on the table, she hurried away, leaving her young mistress in a state of the most painful agitation.

Ethel could scarcely believe, after the actress had left her, but what she had been in a dream. "Good heavens!" exclaimed she, "what a precious thing love is! what a gift of all hope, all happiness, in the power of another!—and yet, how often is it bestowed in vain! wasted, utterly and cruelly wasted! Well, if he loved me, there has been a sad and bitter sympathy between us. Can he have been more wretched than I have been?" and, covering her face with her hands, she gave way to a passionate burst of weeping.

It was so long before she recovered, that her chair was ready first: and, startled at the announcement, she hastened to ask her grandmother's permission for her visit. It was instantly granted; for Mrs. Churchill had always liked Walter, and had

taken a personal satisfaction in his literary success. It was a compliment to her discernment. If ever we forgive another's celebrity, it is when it fulfils our own prophecy. But to have him, who had been a little child playing at her feet, dying in desolation and misery, roused every kindly feeling. She hurried Ethel to put on her cloak, and saw herself to the packing up a basket; containing wine, one or two medicines in which she placed implicit faith, and a note from herself, begging him to come at once to her house to be nursed.

The bustle over, a glow of self-satisfaction in spite of her sorrow, diffusing itself; and, taking one of his volumes, she went to her own chair, and soon found herself shedding tears over the strange mixture of real and ideal misery.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DISCLOSURE.

Young, loving, and beloved—these are brief words;
And yet they touch on all the finer chords,
Whose music is our happiness; the tone
May die away, and be no longer known,
In the sad changes brought by darker years,
When the heart has to treasure up its tears,
And life looks mournful on an altered scene—
Still it is much to think that it has been.

Ethel was yet bathing her eyes with elder-flowers, preparatory to going, when her departure was again delayed by another visiter.

"Tell her," exclaimed she, "that I am just going to a dying friend—ask if she will see my grandmother."

The servant obeyed, but returned almost instantly, saying, "that the lady said, she must entreat Miss Churchill to see her for ten minutes, she would not detain her longer. Indeed, madam," continued the maid, "I think you had better go down, for she is quite the lady, and seems so miserable at the idea of your not seeing her."

"Perhaps," said Ethel, "I had better see her, a few minutes cannot much matter. I know by myself," added she, in a lower tone, that sorrow is impatient."

On entering the parlor into which the visiter had been shown, she saw a tall figure, wrapped in a dark mantle, with her back towards her, in one of the recesses of the windows. The noise of her steps, light as they were, attracted the stranger's notice, who, turning round and letting her mantle fall as she did so, showed a tall and stately figure, dressed in what appeared to be some conventual costume. Her face, though thin and pale, bore the traces of great former beauty; and, although Ethel was sure that she had never seen the lady before, yet there was something in her features strangely familiar.

The color came rapidly into her cheek; her heart told her the face now before her brought the memory of one still too dearly remembered—it was Norbourne Courtenaye that it recalled; the likeness was, despite the difference of sex and age, singularly striking.

What a vain thing is forced forgetfulness! For months Ethel had sedulously banished one image from her thoughts, and she fancied that she had succeeded: alas! even a chance and casual resemblance sufficed to make her tremble with emotion. To such emotion she had long made it a rule not to give way. She steadied her voice; though, with all her resolution, it was a little tremulous; and, entreating her visiter to be seated, asked what were her commands.

The stranger appeared almost to forget that it was her business to speak: she fixed her dark, penetrating eyes on the beautiful girl, who stood, blushing and confused, at the scrutiny.

"Perhaps," said Ethel, a little apprehensively—for the garb of her companion made her think that, perhaps, she was some Jacobite emissary—"it was my grandmother whom you wished to see?"

"No, no, it was yourself!" exclaimed the stranger, eagerly, as if startled by Ethel's voice. "Pardon me, young lady, but I am not well; and to myself my errand is a painful one."

"Pray do not stand," said Ethel; and, drawing a large arm-chair, took the stranger's hand, and gently forced her to be seated.

"Pray sit by me," continued the lady; and Ethel placed herself in the window-seat, wondering at her singular visiter, in whom, however, she could not help feeling interested. "I ought to tell you my name," exclaimed the stranger, breaking silence by an obvious effort, "I am Mrs. Courtenaye."

Ethel started to her feet, turning deadly pale, and sank again on her seat; and her visiter seemed almost startled at the effect which her words had produced. Miss Churchill had, however, for months subjected her feelings to a discipline too severe to be wholly overcome by them now. Her features became cold and calm; and there was a slight touch of haughtiness in her manner, as she said,—

"May I be permitted to ask the cause why Mrs. Courtenaye honors me with a visit?"

"Because the happiness of my only child is in your hands—because," exclaimed she, "I have recently stood by the bed that was every hour expected to be that of death, and during the delirium of fever, yours was the only name upon Norbourne's lips."

"Mrs. Courtenaye," replied Ethel, rising, "it is useless to prolong an interview which can only be humiliating and painful to both."

"Listen to me," cried Mrs. Courtenaye, catching her hand, and detaining her.

"Nay," replied her companion: "I can understand and pity your feelings; but you must, also, respect mine. I entreat you not to enter on a subject which inflicts on me—I will tell you frankly—inflicts on me a degree of pain of which you have little idea."

"You do love him then?" cried Mrs. Courtenaye.

"Madam," returned Ethel, again attempting to leave the room, "you can have no possible right to ask the question."

"I am wrong," exclaimed the other; "but solitude has made my habits abrupt, and my very anxiety defeats my object. All that I implore is, that you will listen to me patiently—listen to me, lady, but for five minutes."

What could Ethel do but resume her seat? and Mrs. Courtenaye continued,—

"Do tell me, before I proceed, whether there was any other motive for your rejection of Norbourne's renewed address than resentment for his former inconstancy?"

"Do not call it resentment," cried Ethel; "perhaps it will save a continuance of this to me most distressing conversation, if I say, that Mr. Courtenaye's conduct has been such that I never could permit myself to regard him with, if you will force it from me, my once trusting affection."

"You do not know," interrupted Mrs. Courtenaye, "the circumstances in which he was placed."

"I believe that I do," returned the other, coldly.

Mrs. Courtenaye looked amazed; a sudden fear, that her story was not the profound secret that she supposed it to be, came over her, and she asked faintly,—"What do you suppose those circumstances to have been?"

"Embarrassments," returned Ethel, with an expression of as much scorn as her sweet face would express, "from which his cousin's wealth set him free."

"Oh, you are quite wrong!" cried his mother; "no love of fortune, nor of ambition, could have tempted Norbourne to desert you. Little, indeed, do you know his high and generous nature, when you suppose that he could be actuated by an interested motive."

"Was it, then," asked Ethel, faintly, "love for his cousin?"

"No," replied Mrs. Courtenaye, "it was love for his mother."

"I do not know," exclaimed Miss Churchill, a little natural

pride increasing her indignation, "why you should have objected to his union with one who, in fortune and family, was his equal in every way; and who loved him—how deeply, how dearly, my own heart only can tell! But why do you thus seek to stir up again feelings, with which you have each so cruelly trifled?"

"Reproach me!" said Mrs. Courtenaye, I deserve it; but do not blame Norbourne. Never has his heart changed from its entire affection for you; and little do you know the wretchedness that he has endured."

"Madam, you might have spared us both this. I pity him! I pity myself!" exclaimed she, struggling with the tears she could no longer suppress; "but my love and my esteem must go together, and you oblige me to tell you that Mr. Courtenaye has forfeited the last."

"But I can restore it to him," cried Mrs. Courtenaye; "I have already delayed my explanation too long: you are an orphan, Miss Churchill; but have you never thought how sweet it would have been to have had a mother—one who knelt, blessing your pillow, every night, and watched your steps during day? Suppose that you had such a parent, that you knew you had been from your birth her only object in the wide, cold world, would you not have made some sacrfiice for her sake?"

"Any, even to my life!" returned Ethel, in a faltering voice.

"Suppose," continued Mrs. Courtenaye, "that that mother had knelt at your feet; told you that her life, and, far more precious than life, her honour, were in your hands, and implored you to save them, would you not have yielded to her frantic entreaties?"

"I would!" cried Ethel, but her voice was scarcely audible.

Mrs. Courtenaye then rapidly sketched her previous history; and, long before it was ended, Ethel had bowed her face in her hands, and was weeping bitterly.

"Oh!" exclaimed she, "true and generous as ever! how I have misjudged him!"

"The atonement is in your own hands," said Mrs. Courtenaye; "you will let him see you this evening?"

"If he loves me still," whispered Ethel; but now she felt deep in her own heart, that affection knows no change, nor shadow of turning.

CHAPTER LVII.

MEETING.

Over that pallid face were wrought
The characters of painful thought;
But on that lip, and in that eye,
Were patience, faith, and piety.
The hope that is not of this earth,
The peace that has in pain its birth;
As if, in the tumult of this life,
Its sorrow, vanity, and strife,
Had been but as the lightning's shock,
Shedding rich ore upon the rock:
Though in the trial scorched and riven,
The gold it wins, is gold from heaven.

The window of Walter Maynard's small and wretched chamber looked into a churchyard, the same on which he had gazed the night of his arrival in London. It was one of those dreary burial places, where nothing redeems the desolate aspect of mortality. The square, upright tombstones were crowded together as if there were not room for the very dead. It may be a weakness, though growing out of all that is most redeeming in our nature,—the desire that is in us to make the City of the Departed beautiful, as well as sacred. The green yew that flings down its shadow, the wild flowers that spring up in the long grass, take away from the desolation, they are the type and sign of a world beyond themselves. Even as spring brings back the leaf to the bough, the blossom to the grass, so will a more glorious spring return to that which is now but a little human dust.

Suddenly, Walter Maynard turned from the window, out of which he had been gazing long and silently: "And there," exclaimed he, "I shall be laid in the course of a few days, it may be, hours. I loathe those dull, damp stones. Do you care where you are buried?" said he, turning suddenly to Lavinia.

"Not the least! What difference can it make?" asked she.

"It is strange," continued he, "that the profession of both has its existence in opinion, and yet you care nothing for what is abstract and picturesque in it."

"You have cared only too much," replied she, gazing upon him sadly.

"Not so, returned he, earnestly, a last gleam of enthusiasm kindling up his large clear eyes; "I have not cared enough. Deeply do I feel at this moment, when the scattered thoughts obey my bidding no longer, and the hand, once so swift to give them tangible shape, lies languid at my side, that I have not done half that I ought to have done. How many hours of wasted time, how many worse than wasted, now rise up in judgment against me! And, oh, my God! have I sufficiently felt the moral responsibility of gifts like my own? Have I not questioned, sometimes too rashly, of what it was never meant mortal mind should measure? Have I not sometimes flung the passing annoyance of a wounded feeling too bitterly on my pages? I repent me of it now!"

He paused, for the dews gathered on his forehead; but again the transient light kindled in his face, till it was even as that of an angel. Earthly passion, whether of anger or of sorrow, had faded from that pure white brow; the eyes looked back the heaven on which they gazed—they were full of it.

"Oh, my Creator!" exclaimed he, clasping his thin, wan hands, "I am not worthy of the gifts bestowed upon me! Let me not forget that, though this worn and fevered frame perish, the soul ascends hopeful, meekly hopeful, of its native heaven; and my mind remains behind to influence and to benefit its race: may what was in aught evil of its creations be forgotten; may aught that was good, endure to the end. There is a deep and sacred assurance at my heart, that what I have done will not be quite in vain. Even at this last moment, I feel it is sweet to bequeath my memory to the aspirations and sympathies of my kind."

He leaned back—pale, faint, but calm; and, at that moment, Lavinia, who had been occupied by anxious expectation of Miss Churchill's arrival, was called from the room.

"Can you," said she, on her return, "receive a visiter whom, only yesterday, you were wishing to see?"

An instinct of the heart seemed to tell Walter who the visiter was, and a faint color came, for a moment, over his face.

"She has come!" exclaimed he; "let me look upon her, and die happy!"

He strove to rise, but the next moment Ethel's gentle hand forced him to be seated; as, in a broken voice, she said, "Oh, Walter! was it kind to let your old friends find you thus?"

He looked at her with a sweet, calm smile, as he answered, "They find me happy!"

CHAPTER LVIII.

PARTING.

That is love
Which chooseth from a thousand only one
To be the object of that tenderness
Natural to every heart; which can resign
Its own best happiness for one dear sake;
Can bear with absence; hath no part in hope,
For hope is somewhat selfish: love is not,
And doth prefer another to itself.

"Do not," whispered Walter, as he watched Ethel's eyes glance round the room, and then turn mournfully on himself, "Do not pity the poverty which surrounds me; but for that I should have lost the greatest happiness life has known. It is to your gentle charity that I owe this visit, that my last look will fall on the face which has to me been, through life, my most sweet and sacred dream. Fairest and dearest, if I leave behind me ought of passionate feeling, and of true emotion, it is to your inspiration that I owe it."

Another visiter disturbed them: and softly, but hastily, Norbourne Courtenaye entered the room.

"Oh, Walter!" exclaimed he, "did our true friendship deserve that you should let me find you thus? I have found you, too, with such difficulty——"

He broke off abruptly, for he caught sight of Ethel. There was, however, no time for indulgence of individual feeling; for, overcome by the exertion just made, Walter had sunk back in his chair fainting. In a few moments he revived, but a change had passed over his countenance—death was in every feature. Once more his large dark eyes lighted with transient lustre, as he gazed earnestly on Ethel and Norbourne, who stood before him.

"Do you remember," said he, in a voice so hollow and so low, that the accents were scarce audible, "the last evening that we spent beside the little fountain? Why should coldness have taken the place of that love which I then believed was so happy, so perfect? What could have parted you? At this moment, though your looks are averted, there is love in them, that love which nothing else can supply. I pray of you, let no

worldly motive, no false pride, no vanity, come between your affection!"

He was holding a hand of each; and, feebly, he put them together. Norbourne started, for he felt that Ethel did not withdraw hers. He looked at her for a moment; her eyes dropped, but in that sweet and conscious look he read a new world of hope and love."

"God bless you!" said Walter. "Lavinia! my kind, my generous nurse!" addded he, in accents more and more broken, "may your kindness to me be requited tenfold! Ah! if my dying words might in aught avail, you would leave——"

But his words died in a strange gurgling in the throat; the eyes suddenly became fixed; the mouth fell; once he stretched out his hands convulsively, but they instantly relaxed, and his head sunk on Norbourne's arm. They raised him; and, carrying him to the bed, laid him there. Pale, tranquil, and sweet, his face looked sleep, not death. They knelt by the bedside, at first too awe-struck for sorrow; prayers, not tears, seemed fitted to the scene: they felt as if around them were the presence of Heaven.

And so perished, in the flower of his age, in the promise of his mind, the high-minded and gifted Walter Maynard. He died poor, surrounded by the presence of life's harsh and evil allotment, but the faithful and affectionate spirit kept its own to the last. Depressed, sorrowful, he might be, as he went on a hard path wearily; but he died hopeful and loving. His poet's heart clung to this world, but to leave it a rich legacy of feelings and of thoughts; his spirit welcomed death, the eternal guide to the mighty world beyond the grave.

How many beautiful creations, how many glorious dreams went with him to the tomb! but the unfulfilled destiny of genius is a mystery whose solution is not of earth. It is but one of those many voices wandering in this wilderness of ours that tell us, not here is our lot appointed to finish. We are here but for a space and a season; for a task and a trial, and of the end no man knoweth. The earthly immortality of the mind is but a type of the heavenly immortality of the soul. Peace be to the beating heart and the worn spirit that had just departed, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest!"

CHAPTER LIX.

THE END.

Farewell!
Shadows and scenes that have, for many hours,
Been my companions; I part from ye like friends—
Dear and familiar ones—with deep sad thoughts,
And hopes, almost misgivings!

"Forgive me," said Lord Norbourne, as he led the bride into the little chapel, where, at his desire, the marriage was to take place, "if, with vain confidence in myself, I too rashly took the happiness of others into my own keeping. Forgive me for the sake of my lost Constance, whose place to me you will fill, while this life lasts!"

Ethel could not speak, but her look was enough. Mrs. Courtenaye was not at her son's second marriage; unyielding, yet generous, she was one of those spirits to whom self-sacrifice is a relief. The faith of solitude and penance suited her mind; and she had entered one of those convents which, quiet and secluded, existed yet in England. In her eyes the sacrifice was atonement, and an offering for others. Sincere and enthusiastic in her belief, the prayers that, for years, she offered for her son's happiness, made her own.

Both Mrs. Churchill and Lord Norbourne lived to an extreme old age; the last, with a happiness around his latter days, that had never belonged to his earlier years. The loss of his youngest and most beloved child had been to him the bitterest feeling of his life; but it had worked in him for good. Sorrow had subdued, and affection had softened, his nature; his sweet child had been his good angel. Her latest prayer was fulfilled even in this world; and her father found, beside the hearth of her husband, the interest and the solace of his old age.

Lavinia Fenton's history belongs to that of her time. In spite of Miss Churchill's entreaties, she continued on the stage; and her success in *Polly* of the *Beggars' Opera*, is well known. She ended by becoming Duchess of Bolton; one of those strange instances of mere worldly prosperity, which set all ordinary calculation at defiance.

The conclusion of Lady Mary Wortley Montague's career is, also, matter of history; one of its grave, sad lessons. Clever

—beautiful—with every advantage of nature and fortune, her youth was a vain search after happiness, under the mistaken name of pleasure. I do not know a moral picture more degrading than the weakness which, for years, made her shrink from the sight of a looking glass; nor any thing more disconsolate than her long residence, during her advanced life, in a foreign country, remote alike from the sphere of her duties and her affections. Brilliant—witty—searching into human nature, as her letters undoubtedly are, there is a fearful deficiency in all higher feeling and nobler motive; the only redeeming point—but how much, indeed, does that redeem—is her tenderness for her daughter. We owe, also, to Lady Mary the introduction of inoculation—the moral courage she displayed; the blessing conferred by her exertions may well silence the harsh judgment which suits so little with our narrow and finite intelligence.

It was just such an evening, by

> "Departed summer tenderly illumined,"

as the one on which our narrative commenced, that Norbourne and Ethel stood beside the little fountain, whose scattered silver fell over the blue harebells around.

They had been married at Norbourne Park, but they mutually wished to pass the first few weeks of their wedded happiness in the place which had witnessed the commencement of their love. We can bear to look back on past suffering when in the very fullness of content. Norbourne had been leaning for some time watching the soft shadows, that, as they passed, gave each a new aspect to the landscape around, before Ethel joined him. She came down the same winding path, through the wilderness, by which Henrietta had joined them the night before she went to London.

"You look pale, dearest," said Norbourne! "these daily visits to Lady Marchmont, in her wretched state, are too much for you."

"Not so," replied Ethel; "you would not, I am sure, wish me to shrink from what I hold to be a duty, though a painful one. Poor Henrietta has no friend in the world but myself. Hopeless as her madness is, though she knows me not, my presence soothes her; and with me she is gentle as a child."

"Incurable insanity!" exclaimed Norbourne, "violent or melancholy, it is an awful visitation on one so young, so beautiful, and so gifted!"

"God grant," said Ethel, "that her sufferings in this world may be her atonement in the next. As far as human skill can say, years, long years, are before her. To us, Norbourne, she will be as a sister, is it not so?"

Her husband's only answer was to clasp still closer the hand that he held in his. "You must come with me," said he, after a few moments' silence; "you will not know why I would not let you go through the churchyard this week."

They turned into the little path that led to the church, whose Gothic windows were kindled by the setting sun. Even the dark yew trees were lighted up as if by some lustrous and spiritual presence. His wife saw that beneath the one to which they were approaching, a monument had been newly erected.

"It was his last wish," said Norbourne, "not to be buried in London."

Ethel looked up, and read on a white marble tablet the brief inscription of—"SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF WALTER MAYNARD."

THE END.


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